THE INDIAN STAGE

By

HEMENDRA NATH DAS GUPTA

Price: Rupees Five only
Foreign Nine

Printed by S. N. Ganguly and Published by
Metropolitan Printing & Publishing House, Ltd.
56, Dharamtala Street, Calcutta

To

The [illegible] memory of

of

Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee

[illegible]

APOLOGIA

About the year 1917, when I was occupied with my Bengali treatise, *Girish Pratibha*—a critical study of Girish Chandra and his dramatic art—I sorely felt the want of a connected history of the Bengali Stage. In the course of the preparation of that book, Sreejut Debendra Nath Bose, a veteran literateur and a cousin of Girish Chandra, suggested to me the importance of finding out the opening date of each one of the Bengali dramas hitherto acted on the Bengali Stage; for, he said, that would give a historical value to the book. The last chapter of that treatise will show how I have faithfully followed up that idea.

When, with the above object in view, I began to hunt up old newspapers, gazettes, and other contemporary records in the archives of the Imperial Library of Calcutta, many interesting things about the early theatres of Bengal came to my knowledge. It was then that I first conceived the idea of writing a complete History of the Bengali Stage.

When my first articles on the beginning of the Bengali Stage and on Lebedeff appeared in the year 1924, in the columns of the "Forward", the famous national organ of that time, founded by Deshabandhu Das (late Mr. C. R. Das), there were few workers in the field. Since then some treatises have appeared, but as the present work and its succeeding volumes are the fruit of seventeen years' arduous labour, I leave it to the public to judge whether there is any justification for its publication.



It is very fortunate that while going to the press for this last item of the work, I met my friend Dr. Joyanta Kumar Das Gupta, who supplied me with the couplet of Vidya Sundar that had been quoted by Heresim Lebedeff in the title page of his Grammar of Mixed Languages, as found in the British Museum and copied verbatim by the Doctor while a research scholar there. The absence of this couplet, simple as it is, though I dealt with the matter rather elaborately in pages 219 to 258 of this book, would have been greatly missed by the readers and with my warmest thanks to Dr. Das Gupta I quote, though rather unusually, the whole couplet here :—

"Shuno Ānandit Raja kahila Tāhāre
Beia-kāron adie Shāstro Parāho Beddāre
Agge Pae Beprobar Beddere Parāy
Beiakoronedie Kābbeo Shangito Nirnoy
Joitish Tipponie Ticā Koteco Parcār
Alpo cāle Bohoo Shāstre hoilo adhicār
Chitrokorie ak Shloc Lekelec Pate
Nijo Pariechoy deia toolilo Tahate."

Beddo-Shoondor Vol. 1.

That is, the king ordered his daughter Vidya to be taught in Grammar, poetry, music etc., and she acquired a knowledge of these subjects through the exertion of the Brahmine scholar.

I have great pleasure in expressing my gratitude to my learned predecessors who have dealt with the subject and thrown much light upon the early Bengali Stage. Three of them deserve special mention, and they are Sj. Jogendra Nath Bose. the biographer of Michael M Dutt, Pandit Mahendra Nath Vidyanidhi

and Babu Kiran Chandra Dutt, the last of whom helped me with books and suggestions.

I cannot adequately express my thanks to Pandit Asoke Nath Bhattacherjee and Babu Girija Sankar Roy Choudhury, two well-known scholars, the former for going through the proofs of the first fifteen formes and supplying the correct readings of the Sanskrit Slokas; and the latter for helping me with many authoritative references from Vaishnava literature on which he is an established authority. Girija Babu and myself were early disciples of the late Mr. C. R. Das, who was not only the chief priest of Nationalism in India, but an eminent poet and an acute critic of Bengali Lyrics from its earliest stage up to the beginning of the twentieth century. I have been greatly helped in this work by my esteemed friend, Mr. Bhupendra Nath Das, M. L. C. (Burmah) Advocate. I am also deeply grateful for the kind encouragement and help that I have received from Mr. R. H. Parker, Addl. Sessions Judge, Alipur, and his venerable father-in-law, Sir Evans Cotton, Late President, Bengal Legislative Council and author of "Calcutta, Past and Present." My thanks are also due to my friends, Babu Makhan Lal Sen, the author of the English Translation of the Ramayana, Babu Sourindra Kumar Bhattacherjee, Babu Monmotho Nath Ghose, author of "Memoirs of Kaliprasanna", Prof. Monmotho Mohon Bose, Prof. Sailendra Nath Mitra and Mr. Surendra Nath Kumar, Superintendent Imperial Library, for the valuable help and suggestions they ungrudgingly gave me. My acknowledgments are also due to my friend and colleague Babu Surendranath Biswas, and Prof. Jites Chandra Guha of Vidyasagar College for their

kind assistance. Last and not the least, I must place on record my extreme thankfulness to Babu Sachchidananda Bhattacherjya, a premier businessman of Bengal and a patron of literature, who, I am proud to say, is one of my quondam pupils, for taking upon himself the responsibility of making arrangements for the publication of this work.

I regard it a singular piece of luck on my part that such an eminent Orientalist as Mr. Johan Van Manen has so kindly written a masterly preface to this volume.

In conclusion, I should frankly tell my reader that my only reason for issuing the book in English is to acquaint the cultured nations of both the East and the West about the cultural history of the Bengali Drama, and its relation to the ancient Indian Stage.

31, Haldarpara Road,
Kalighat, Calcutta.

HEMENDRANATH DAS GUPTA.

PREFACE

No civilised country has ever been without its drama The dramatic instinct is universal. The theatre, in whatever form, sacred or secular, has never failed to make its powerful appeal to man. Every nation and every race possesses its own dramatic history, India as well as the rest of the world. The word 'drama' means action and its appeal may perhaps be explained by that wise saying in the Bhagavat Gita that action is stronger than destiny. To study a cultural phenomenon so universal as the drama, and of such great influence as it exercises, must be of importance.

Classical works have been written concerning the Indian drama by Sylvain Levi, Sten Konow and Berriedale Keith, which are known to all students of the subject. Schuyler has added an extensive bibliography of the Sanskrit Drama. The study of the Indian stage has, indeed, not been neglected by scholars. What, however, has been written to date by professional Orientalists concerning the Indian theatre is chiefly on lines of academical scholarship. Historical studies by philologists tend to deal with the problem on the basis of theoretical canons and to follow the scholastic text books.

An eminent Orientalist has rightly warned against the impression that the full life of ancient India is enshrined in its manuscripts. This general maxim should surely be applied to the study of c art. The rich variety of the drama and its tial human nature have been

excellently summarised by that great theatrical producer, Max Reinhardt, as follows :—

> "It is to the actor and to no one else that the theatre belongs. This does not mean, of course, the professional actor alone, but the actor as poet, as director, stage-manager, musician, scene-designer, painter, and certainly not least of all, the actor as spectator, for the contribution of the spectators is almost as important as that of the cast. The audience must take its part in the play if we are ever to see arise a true art of the theatre—the oldest, most powerful, and most immediate of the arts, combining the many in one."

Bearing these two statements in mind it is evident that only a few years ago studies of the Indian drama based on this broader outlook were entirely lacking. Whether already at the present moment such studies can be produced with any degree of completeness may be doubted. Anyhow, beginnings may be made, and should be made, aiming at a treatment of definitely limited aspects of the great subject.

The confluence between European and Indian civilisation is like that of those great Indian rivers which, after uniting, flow on as a single stream, constituted by the waters of the two original rivers. So also the confluence, brought about by European colonisation, of the characteristic Indian dramatic tradition with the imported Western one has united two very different streams of theory and practice Whether this intermixture will result in the birth of an entirely new tradition, or lead to the [illegible]n and transformation of the indigenous

tradition, or to a permanent hybridisation of either or both, or to the extinction of one of the two traditions in India, cannot at present be foreseen. We are with regard to the drama in a transition stage of which we cannot predict the future, as we are in a transition stage with regard to so many other cultural manifestations. All the more reason to devote attention to what actually exists around us with a view to its correct description, and all the more necessity to put on record whatever living detail can still be rescued from oblivion in these rapidly shifting times. And above all, all the more necessity to place on record all such details as illustrate the human, fleeting, ephemeral aspects of theatrical life, as may be reliably ascertained for as long a distance in the immediate past as lies within our reach. Such a record, if carefully made, will contain much material of the highest importance for the future historian of and theoriser concerning dramatic art in India, and though it may not be possible to arrive immediately at definite theoretical conclusions through such a record, yet such record cannot but bring together materials from which a future scholar may perhaps be able to distil laws or principles of lasting validity.

As said, a few years ago studies based on the above lines were nearly entirely lacking. To-day the position is different. No less than four different scholars, of whom three are Bengalis, have undertaken an enquiry as indicated. One of them is Mr. Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, the first volume of whose work we here introduce, whilst the other three have published their results before

1930, published in London his work entitled "The Bengali Drama, its origin and development". This was substantially the author's thesis for the Ph.D. Degree of the London University for original research, 1926.

The second is Mr. R. K. Yagnik, who published his work "The Indian Theatre—its origin and its later development under European influence" in London, in 1933. In so far as the modern Indian drama is concerned, Mr. Yagnik mainly deals with its development in Western India. These two works are written in English.

The third is Mr Brajendra Nath Bandopadhyaya (B. N. Banerji), who published his Bangiya Natyasalar Itihas in 1933 through the Calcutta Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. It is written in Bengali and deals with the period from 1795-1876. Its contents more or less coincide with those of the projected second volume of Mr. Das Gupta.

And so we come to the present book.

A comparison between it and the three other works is not called for, but one may easily appreciate the motives which made Mr. Das Gupta decide not to abandon his work because recently the results of similar studies by other scholars had been published before his own.

Mr. Das Gupta, himself an ardent admirer of the dramatic art, has several years ago published in his mother-tongue a critical study of the great Bengali playwright Girish Chandra. Becoming more and more absorbed in his subject he collected incidentally a number of curious and interesting data concerning the Bengali theatre, and he soon conceived the idea of writing a complete history of the Bengali stage from the earliest

recoverable times down to our present day. As early as 1918 he devoted his spare time in hunting through the old daily and weekly papers in the Imperial Library, where I happened to meet him frequently during my tenure of the Librarianship. Gradually he widened the circle of his researches and as a result produced a series of articles on the Bengali stage, especially in the "Forward", then edited by the late Deshbandhu C. R. Das, who himself was not only keenly interested in the subject, but encouraged the writer in every way, even to the extent of promising him to publish at his own expense the projected history, when completed, in book-form. Mr. C. R. Das died, and his patronage will not now benefit the work, but the author is too keenly in love with his subject to abandon his project and he now publishes the first volume of his history. It begins with a short introduction concerning the old Indian drama and then brings us, half-way the volume, to modern times, taking up the story of the drama in Calcutta from the middle of the 18th century. He then proceeds with the story of the various old theatres existing in Calcutta, and brings it down to the middle of the 19th century. This closes the first volume of the projected series of four. The second volume will deal with the Bengali theatres in the days before Girish Chandra up to the Dramatic Performances Act of 1877. The third volume is to be entirely devoted to Girish Chandra and his works, whilst the fourth and last volume will bring the story to date describing the development of the Bengali theatre after Girish Chandra down to our own days.

The author will forgive me a personal reference in this short preface to his first volume. He is an example

of that large professional class who has contributed so much to literature and scholarship in Bengal. A lawyer by profession through force of material necessity—day in and day out, busily engaged in the grim drama, or ludicrous comedy of the Courts—he sheds, as so many of his brethren, his legal robes when leaving court to become a student of life instead of one of law, and an incarnation of humanity instead of one of officialdom. It has always struck me how great a service the lawyer class has rendered to scholarship and literature in this country, a tradition which we would hope will not die for many a long day to come. As Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal I cannot forget that this venerable Society itself was founded by a lawyer, Sir William Jones, and I most heartily welcome this latest follower of the old example. May the Author be rewarded for his labour by adequate response from his public and the appreciation he deserves, and may it be given to him to bring to a successful conclusion his great project, which is to furnish the future student with a storehouse of references concerning the drama in Bengal during the last two centuries, with a great variety of living pen-pictures concerning actors and public, and vivid descriptions of the scenes and circumstances of the Indian theatre in Bengal.

It would be out of place to say anything in praise of the book in this Preface. If praise there be it should come from the reader. Any other would, according to circumstances, be either superfluous or out of place.

For, to quote from Shakuntala :—

> "No skill in acting can I deem complete,
> Till from the wise the actor gains applause."

But what surely deserves mention is a reference to the laborious nature of research entailed by the writing of a book like the present. We well know the Author's great patience and perseverance. These two qualities coupled with accuracy and enthusiasm are sure to produce valuable results.

And now to speak with Shudraka :—

> "Enough of this tedious work which fritters away
> the interest of the audience!"

We now give way to the author himself, pointing out that in his book he has attempted to help forward the fulfilment of the wish with which Kalidasa ends his most famous drama :—

> "May the divine Saraswati, the source
> Of Speech, and goddess of dramatic art,
> Be ever honoured by the great and wise!"

We may then aptly end with another quotation from the great Indian dramatist, which applies to the present situation :—

"I have now only to request the audience that they will listen to this work with attention and kindness, in consideration of its subject and respect for the author."

CALCUTTA,
4, Park Street,
4th April, 1934.

JOHAN VAN MANEN,
General Secretary,
Asiatic Society of Bengal.

CONTENTS

PART II

THE INDIAN STAGE

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

The stage constitutes a very important chapter in the social and political history of a people, and the bend of national genius cannot be fully comprehended without its study A puritan may look askance at the play-house, but its influence over the mass cannot be ignored, and it is no exaggeration to say that a 'nation is known by its theatre.' One can know more about Greek character from their immortal plays than from the pages of a formal history. When Dionysias, the king of Syracuse, wanted to learn something about the state and language of Athens, Plato sent him the comedies of Aristophanes telling him that there he would find the best respresentation of the Athenian character. Likewise the Mricchakatika or the Toy-cart gives us a more graphic picture of the ancient Indian society than any other treatise of that time. From the pure stand-point of art, dramas and the stage have an ethical and a historical value of their own.

Forces more than one have contributed to the making of Modern Bengal, and the influence of the Bengali stage should be reckoned as one of them.

Bengali drama, like Bengali language, has its origin in the remote past, but like many other modern institutions of the country, is an adaptation after the western ideal, and the modern Bengali stage was, in fact, first founded in imitation of the early English theatres of Calcutta. Still the spirit of a Bengali Drama is essentially eastern, and some of the present techniques of the Bengali stage can not be fully understood without a study of Sanskrit drama and of the ancient Indian stage. There exists an unsevered link between the present and the past, hence we intend to give a brief review of the origin and growth of dramatic

performance in India. We hope educated readers will kindly forgive us for our latitude.

Sanskrit Drama itself underwent several stages of development which may broadly be divided into two periods : First the Legendary Stage, the Second, the Historical Stage. The latter may again be studied under its purely literary aspect, and in its plastic representations in archæology and in their concrete embodiments in other departments of Art.

The object of dramatic representations according to Professor H. H. Wilson, as described by the Hindu critics, is :—"They are to convey instructions through the means of amusement and with this view, they must affect the minds of the spectators with the sentiments which they express. These sentiments are termed by the Hindus, as Rasas, taste (flavour) and they imply both the quality as inherent in the composition and the perception of it as recognised by the reader or spectator. The Rasas, (रस) however, are considered usually as effects, not causes ; and they are said to come from the Bhavas, (भाव) i. e. the conditions of the mind or body, which are followed by a corresponding expression in those who feel, or are supposed to feel, them, and a corresponding impression on those who behold them. When these conditions are of a permanent, or durable description and produce a lasting and general impression, which is not disturbed by the influence of collateral or contrary excitements, they are, in fact, the same with the impressions ; as desire or love, as the main object of the action, is both the condition of the chief character, and the sentiment with which the spectator is filled. When the conditions are incidental and transitory, they contribute to the general impression, but are not confounded with it. They may, indeed, be contrary to it in their essence, without weakening or counteracting it as a hero may, for public reasons, abandon his mistress without foregoing his love, and may perform acts of horror even in furtherance of his passions."

"The drama and the theatre produce each other. A dramatic work becomes most impressive when acted within the four walls of a theatre ; and a theatre is a most powerful engine for the development of the drama."

While following the sources and progress of drama and of the stage, we should note initially that a dramatic representation consisted mainly of three things :

Dialogues, Music and Dancing—The value of an instructive, or an entertaining dialogue was well-understood in India and our religious scriptures—the Vedas and Upanishads, Samhitas, Mahabharata, Tantras, Puranas and even Jatakas or Bauddha Akhyanas are founded on conversations. In fact, another name of the Veda is Shruti—what was heard i.e. from conversations.

No other race seemed to possess a keener ear for music. The ancient Hindus regarded it as a great medium of religious worship. Their Sama (साम) songs were calculated to please the gods of Heaven. The sacred lays of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata supplied no end of music, and the songs of Lava and Kusha echoed and re-echoed throughout the length and breadth of India. Their music could move stones and trees into ecstasy ! Even beasts and birds responded to its music ; and when youthful Krishna played upon his flute, under the Kadamba tree, whole nature seemed to reel with love, all listned to its thrilling notes with rapt attention, and the sacred Yamuna swelled in tidal flow. Music was such an indispensable adjunct of drama that the derivative meaning of the reputed founder of drama Bharata implies a song* and in Guzrat a singer is called a Bharata (भरत)

Dancing too cast a strong spell of charm. This art, though now much neglected in this country, was cultured with great enthusiasm and care in ancient India. Both the aristocracy and the people set a high value upon it. Even sages came under its sway. A strict Vedantist like Prakashananda Sarasvati had to yield at the devotional dance of Gauranga. Many a devotee (like Vishvamitra,) swerved from their austerities at the dances of nymphs like Menaka sent to them by Indra. It was an accomplishment with princes and royal maids, and dancing was such an indispensable element of dramatic performance that the Sanskrit words, Nata, Nataka, Natya (signifying actor and

*Bha Bhava feeling or emotion Ra means Raga or musical mode and

drama) come from the Sanskrit root Nrit ... ... to dance. It therefore, appears that dancing was the origin of drama.*

Pischel, Weber, Donaldson, authorities on the subject, are also of opinion, that dramatic representation arose not out of the altar, but from merry wild dances. Perhaps it consisted at first of rude mimicries accompanied by frantic dance.

Acting is the combination of the above-mentioned three elements brought to others' view. Indeed "No Drama, is more than potentially such till it is acted." †

As there are different kinds of drama in English—Mystery, Miracle, Morality, Interlude, Tragedy, Comedy, Historical, Pastoral, Pastoral-Comical, Historical-Pastoral, Tragical-Historical, Tragical-Comical, Historical-Pastoral, Melodrama, Farcical-Comedy, Burlesque, Pantomime, Opera, Burlettas, so there were various kinds of plays in Sanskrit Literature and neither the elements of acting, nor the different kinds of Drama were unknown or foreign to Indian genius.

---

* In sanskrit, a dance without gesticulation and speech is called "Nritta", that with gesticulation but not speech is called "Nritya" from which the Nataka or Drama takes its origin.

The Dramatic History of the World, pp. 186.

† Encyclopaedia Bri 11th Edition.

CHAPTER I

THE LEGENDARY STAGE

Dramatic art is said to have its birth in the Devaloka, or in the region of the gods, and Mahadeva or Shiva—one of the great Hindu Trinity—was its originator. Shiva has been called Nataraja, Natesha and Natanatha in the Puranas, and so he has been described in Guha-shilpa—Cave paintings. In the Sangitavidyavinoda and in the Kashika of Nandikeshvara, Shiva has been called Mahanata and Adinata, the greatest and the first of the actors. Brahma learnt that art from Shiva and created the fifth Veda called the Gandharva Veda, otherwise known as the Natya Veda.

Indian drama is purely of Indian origin. It is no more a point of literary contention, but it has been proved to demonstration that Indian drama was developed quite independent of any Western influence. Dr. Horace H. Wilson, who took much interest in the Sanskrit Literature and translated a number of Sanskrit dramas, emphatically maintains that whatever may be the merits or defects of the Hindu dramas, they were unmixedly its own. Thus also writes Dr. Ward in the Encyclopædia Britannica: "There is no real evidence for assuming any influence of Greek examples upon the Indian drama at any stage of its progress." A Sanskrit d bears no affinity to a Greek drama either in form or in spirit, so also the

word Yavanika, or curtain, proves little or less than nothing. It is too late to stick to the old theory of the Greek origin of the Sanskrit drama, rather the mass of evidence, both literary and archæological, in favour of its purely Hindu origin is overwhelming, and we shall notice in the ensuing pages, only some of them which are absolutely essential to follow its evolutionary growth. Suffice to say, that a language which, in the words of Sir William Jones, is "more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisite than the either", could easily produce dramas quite independent of the Greeks, or the Yavanas (Ionians).

In every land, however, the earliest dramatic representation appears to be associated with the religious observances of the people. In Greece, it derived its origin from the hymns which were sung in the festivals of Bacchus in honour of that deity, and tradition points out to its mythical origin, and this also is true of the ancient Indian drama. The Hindus had also some thing more in the form of an emblem of theatre. It is said that Brahma after the victory of the gods over their enemies —the Asuras—first composed a drama for the gratification of Indra, the king of the gods.

It is mentioned in the "Sangitadamodara":

इहानुश्रूयते ब्रह्मा शक्रेणाभ्यर्थितः पुरा ।
चकाराकृष्य वेदेभ्यो नाट्यवेदन्तु पञ्चमम् ॥
उपवेदोऽथ वेदाश्च चत्वारः कथितः स्मृतौ ।
तत्रोपवेदो गान्धर्व्वः शिवेनोक्त. स्वयम्भुवे ॥
तेनापि भरतायोक्तस्तेन मर्त्ते प्रचारितः ।
शिवाब्जयोनिभरतास्तस्मादस्य प्रयोजकाः ॥

The above sloka means that in the days of yore,

Brahma being greeted by Shakra (Indra) for his satisfaction composed a fifth Veda (from the four Vedas) which was called the Natya Veda. Like the Vedas, the sub-Vedas are also four in member. The self-born Brahma learnt this fifth or Gandharva Veda from Shiva and then taught it to the Sage **Bharata** (भरत), who learnt that art and introduced it into the world at the command of his instructor Brahma.

In order to prepare this Natya Veda, or Gandharva Veda (Gan-dharva or dharma, Gan or Song being its chief component), Brahma is said to have taken the elements of recitation from the Rigveda, four kinds of acting, or the art of mimicry from the Yayurveda, songs from the Samaveda, and emotions, passions and sentiments from the Atharvaveda.

Indeed references to the earliest dramatic literature in a nucleus form are to be found in the Rigveda in the dialogues between Sarama and Panis, Yama and Yami, Pururavas and Urvashi etc., and other elements are found in the three other Vedas.

Now, who was this Bharatamuni or Sage Bharata? Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti both have mentioned Bharatamuni in connection of dramatic art, the former has described him as a play-wright and the stage-manager of the gods, and the latter called him as Tauryatrika Sutrakara or the earlist writer on triple symphony (i.e., the union of song, dance and instrumental music).

Being asked by Janaka, father of Sita, Lava, the younger of the twin sons said—

Part of the epic has been composed (by worshipful Valmiki) as a separate work being full of sentiment and

adapted to theatrical exhibition. That he has sent to the venerable sage Bharata, the writer of aphorisms on Triple symphony.—(तौर्यत्रिक सूत्रकार)

Janaka—Why ?

Lava—Because master Bharata wants to have it acted by the nymphs (Apsaras or the divine actresses.)

—The Uttararamacharita, Act IV.

Bhasa, too, has referred to Bharatamuni in his works.

As he is the originator of the dramatic art, the actors are all called Bharataputras or the sons of Bharata, and almost everything connected with drama, or the stage is named after him, and the oldest and most authoritative treatise on Indian Dramaturgy is named after him as "Bharata Natyashastra" (भरतनाट्यशास्त्र). In that book, Bharata speaks in the first person and tells us everything on the stage and art and calls the work as the fifth Veda, having received the knowledge direct from Brahma as a revelation.

In this book, Bharata's "Natyashastra", Jarjara (जर्जर) or setting up of the Flag-staff of Indra is the chief event concerning the sacred rites about the installation of the stage, an incident absolutely absent in the Greek stage.

The history of Jarjara has thus been given in the following way in the Natyashastra :—

भरत उवाच :—

उपस्थितोऽहं लोकेशं प्रयोगार्थं कृताञ्जलिः ॥ ५२ ॥
नाट्यस्य ग्रहणं प्राप्तं ब्रूहि किं करवाण्यहम् ।
एतत्तु वचनं श्रुत्वा प्रत्युवाच पितामहः ॥ ५३ ॥
महानय प्रयोगस्य समयः समुपस्थितः ।
अयं ध्वजमहः श्रीमान् महेन्द्रस्य प्रवर्तते ॥ ५४ ॥

अद्येदानीमयं वेदो नाट्यसंज्ञः प्रयुज्यताम् ।
ततस्तस्मिन् ध्वजमहे निहतासुरदानवे ॥ ५५ ॥
प्रहृष्टामरसङ्कीर्णे महेन्द्रविजयोत्सवे ।
पूर्व्वं कृता मया नान्दी ह्याशीर्व्वचनसंयुता ॥ ५६ ॥
अष्टाङ्गपदसंयुक्ता विचित्रा वेदनिर्म्मिता ।
तदन्तेऽनुकृतिर्बद्धा यथा दैत्याः सुरैर्जिताः ॥ ५७ ॥

Bharata said, "I approached with folded hands the Lord of the worlds for permission to begin the performance. I have already learnt the art of dramaturgy. Tell me what am I to do now ?" said I.

Hearing these words the Great Brahma, the Lord of creation, said—"The right time for dramatic representation is come. The festivity in honour of the flag-staff of Indra is about to be celebrated. Now you should give an exhibition of your dramatic art."

"In that 'flag-staff festival' that was held to celebrate the victory of Indra (over the Asuras) and in which the jubilant gods gathered together, I first composed Nāndi (a benedictory verse) full of benedictions. It is wonderful in composition, culled from the Vedas, and composed of eight subsidiary sentences. Thereafter, a mimic reproduction (anukriti) was added as to how the demons were defeated by gods."

(Natysahastra—Baroda Ed. 1st Chapter, Slokas 52-57).

Bharata said :—"Then the gods with Brahma at their head, were delighted at seeing the representation and made a present of all requisites to my sons ; and glad at heart, Shakra (i.e. Indra) was the first to offer his own auspicious banner or flag-staff. (This is Shakradhvaja which was afterwards called Jarjara) When the perfor mance again began representing the on of the

Daityas (Asuras) and Danavas, the latter who had assembled *there, became mortified.* They *conjured* up the demons of impediment or obstruction (Vighnas) with Virupaksha at their head, saying "we do not want this sort of performance, so come ye all." Then those demons of impediments, together with those that had gathered there, became invisible through the power of magic and paralysed the faculties of speech, movement, and memory of the actors. Finding confusion on the part of Sutradhara and his party, Indra asked why was this disturbance in the representation? He then plunged himself into meditation. Then he found the pandal (auditorium) full of the Demons of hindrance, and the Sutradhara with his party out of their senses and paralysed. Shakra rose up at once, his *person shining* with various kinds of jewels and his eyes sparkling with the fire of anger, and took up the excellent flag Shakradhvaja, and with the help of that, the king of gods, shattered the bodies of the Demons of *impediments* who had got upon the stage (58-69).

ततो ब्रह्मादयो देवाः प्रयोगपरितोषिताः ॥ ५८ ॥
प्रददुर्मत्सुतेभ्यस्तु सर्व्वोपकरणानि वै ।
प्रीतस्तु प्रथमं शक्रो दत्तवान् स्व ध्वज शुभम् ॥ ५९ ॥
एवं प्रयोगे प्रारब्धे दैत्यदानवनाशने ॥ ६७ ॥
अभवन् क्षुभिताः सर्व्वे दैत्या ये तत्र सङ्गताः ।
विरूपाक्षपुरोगांश्च विघ्नानुत्पादयन्ति ते ॥ ६४ ॥
नेत्थमिच्छामहे नाट्यमेतदागम्यतामिति ।
ततस्तैरसुरैः सार्द्धं विघ्ना मायामुपाश्रिताः ॥ ६५ ॥
वाचश्चेष्टां स्मृतिञ्चैव स्तम्भयन्ति स्म नृत्यताम् ।
तथा विध्वंसनं दृष्टा सूत्रधारस्य देवराट् ॥ ६६ ॥
कस्मात् प्रयोगवैषम्यमित्युक्त्वा ध्यानमाविशत् ।
अथापश्यत् सदो विघ्नैः समन्तात् परिवारितम् ॥ ६७ ॥

सहेतरैः सूत्रधारं नष्टसंज्ञं जडीकृतम् ।
उत्थाय त्वरितं शक्रो गृहीत्वा ध्वजमुत्तमम् ॥ ६८ ॥
सर्व्वरत्नोज्ज्वलतनुः किञ्चिदुद्वृत्तलोचनः ।
रङ्गपीठगतान् विघ्नानसुरांश्चैव देवराट् ॥ ६९ ॥
जर्जरीकृतदेहांस्तानकरोज्जर्जरेण सः ।

—भरत-नाट्यशास्त्रे प्रथमोऽध्यायः ।

The Danavas together with the Demons of impediments being thus totally annihilated, all the gods uttered the following words in joy:—

"Wonderful and divine is this weapon used by you by which the Demons have been shattered all over. Since the Vighnas with Asuras have been shattered (Jarjarikrita) with this, henceforth it will be known as Jarjara by name. The remainder of the mischievous demons that might attempt to do any injury will similarly perish at the sight of the Jarjara". From the act of shattering *i.e.* belabouring, the staff was called Jarjara.

Then Shakra said to the gods "Be it so, this Jarjara will be the means of protection of all" (72-74).

निहतेषु च सर्व्वेषु विघ्नेषु सह दानवैः ॥ ७० ॥
सम्प्रहृष्य ततो वाक्यमाहुः सर्व्वे दिवौकसः ।
अहो प्रहरणं दिव्यमिदमासादितं त्वया ॥ ७१ ॥
जर्जरीकृतसर्व्वाङ्गा येनैते दानवाः कृताः ।
यस्मादनेन ते विघ्नाः सासुरा जर्जरीकृताः ॥ ७२ ॥
तस्माज्जर्जर एवेति नामतोऽयं भविष्यति ।
शेषा ये चैव हिंसार्थमुपयास्यन्ति हिंसकाः ॥ ७३ ॥
दृष्ट्वैव जर्जरं तेऽपि ह

So we find that Jarjara, or the setting up the flag-staff of Indra was the chief event concerning the sacred rites about the stage, and henceforth it became the emblem of Indra, and of the stage and the Drama. The flag-staff had to be erected in the evening of the theatre, sanctified with Mantras on the day preceding the festivity. The day after the erection of the Flag-staff, i.e. on the day of the festivity, all the deities and the "Jarjara" itself were worshipped. In the five knots, or rinds of the staff Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, Kartikeya and three great serpents (Nagas—Shesha, Vasuki and Takshaka) were supposed to preside. The first part of the staff was wrapped in white linen, the second part in blue linen, the third part in yellow, the fourth part in red, and the fifth in parti-coloured cloth. Different deities were invoked with different Mantras. All these are to be found in the "Natyashastra"

The Jarjara measured 108 angulas or 81 inches and might be made of any wood preferably bamboo, from which Pandit Haraprasad Shastri wants us to conclude that dramatic art originated in that part of India where bamboos grow in abundance.* It used to be covered and decorated with cloths of different colours and it was enjoined that neither deformed nor ugly nor diseased persons should be employed for its construction, nor beggars and monks be allowed to come near it.

The belabouring of the Asuras was not agreeable to Bharata who prayed to Brahma to give protection to the dramatic representation of plays. Brahma ordered

* Vide Pandit Haraprasad Shastri's article "The Origin of Indian Drama"—Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, new series Vol V. 1909, pp. 351.

Visvakarman, the divine architect, to erect a pavilion for the purpose and assigned to the gods the task of different parts in such a way that no 'vighnas' (impediments) might be henceforth created by the enemies. The Asuras too were invited by Brahma who clearly explained to them the object of the new invention. It was made clear by him that the amusement and instruction received from the performances were meant for all—the Devas and Asuras alike—and not exclusively for the Devas. People suffering from bereavement or miseries might have a relief : and piety, good sense and intelligence might be learnt here :

नैकान्ततोऽत्र भवतां देवाना चानुभावनम् । १०६ ।
त्रैलोक्यस्यास्य सर्व्वस्य नाट्य भावानुकीर्त्तनम् ॥१०७॥

नाट्यशास्त्रे प्रथमः अध्यायः ।

Indeed the Natya or acting is nothing but imitation of all events happening in this world. The Asuras were then appeased and henceforth created no further disturbance in the performances.

THE TIME OF THE JARJARA FESTIVAL

The Jarjara festival has everywhere been marked with festivities. Just as spring brings life and energy to the people of the North after winter, so autumn too in the East inspires the people with sprightliness and joy after the damping rains. The English people had even in Shakespeare's time celebrated their "May Pole" with songs and dancings to record their grateful feelings for the advent of spring, and likewise, the Indian people celebrated the advent of dry and delightful autumn after sultry and wet days of tedious rains in their own way. In both the countries, the cause underlying these celebrations is, in

reality, one and the same. Even to-day relics of this 'Dhvaja' in different shapes are generally found in autumn during the harvest time. After the rains, a flag-staff is raised on the harvest field and it is followed by popular amusements and thanks-giving to Indra for good crops and rain (Indra being the god of rains). The worship is performed on the 12th of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada to ensure good crops and general prosperity.*

Formerly all public festivities were accompanied by dramatic performances. Hence Jarjara, as necessary accompaniment of drama, was carried to all festive occasions, even if there was no performance in any particular instance. The custom of raising the flag-staff and worshipping the gods during the autumn is prevalent in nearly all parts of India. Indra-jatra is the principal ceremony of Nepal and Bhutan. No flag-staff is raised there, but Indra is shown in the images as having his hands stretched, reminding the people of the flag-staff. The idea prevalent in those places is that the sight of the above image drives out evil spirits. In subsequent times also the Jarjara or the flag-staff of Indra became permanently associated with the dramatic representations of ancient India as we have it in Mahabharata,† where the king Vasu was asked to set up a bamboo-pole adorned with garlands and with it perform the worship of Indra. Jarjara-worship is thus a very ancient ceremony and had nothing to do with the people of the West.

Though Jarjara-worship belonged mainly to a period

*Cf J. J. Meyer, Hindu Tales (Old Jain) pp. 143 "The nautch girls danced, poems were sung, a multitude of men danced etc.

† Adiparva, ch. 63.

of the autumn, it however resembled the modern Holi festival at the Equinox. The dyeing with Abira (Kum-Kum) at this season which is only an emblem of the Devas dyeing with blood of the Asuras, marks the festival of great rejoicings. We have also on record about the 'Dramas' (pages 164-5)* of Dutangada being performed at the Dhooly festival in honour of the ancestor of the reigning King †

As the flag-staff worship with which the first Indian drama was connected resembles the May-Pole Dance of Europe and the Holi Festival of India, both taking place during the spring time, some scholars connect it with the spring festival. But the autumn festivals are more important in India and everybody's heart is filled with joy after the rains are over, and the ceremony was converted into a festival of thanks-giving for Indra's victory over the clouds. Pandit Haraprasad Shastri also maintains this view.

Dr. Keith also is of the same opinion. "It is an interesting coincidence," says the Doctor, "with the comparison made by Growse of the Holi and May Day rites that Haraprasad Shastri should have found an explanation of the origin of Indian Drama in the fact that in the preliminaries of the play there is special attention devoted to the salutation of Indra's banner which is a flag-staff decorated with colours and bunting. The Indian legend of the origin of dramas tells that when Bharata was bidden to teach on earth the divine art invented by Brahma, the occasion decided upon was the banner-festival

* Cf J. C. Oman-Brahmn and the Indian life, page 66, 73 sqq.
† Mathura pp. 91. f, 101 f.

of Indra. *"The plot of the drama was the humiliation of the Asuras at the hands of the gods. Hence the Asuras rose in wrath but Indra seized the staff of his banner and beat them off, whence the staff of the banner was used as protection at the beginning of the drama."—(A.B. Keith's "The Sanskrit Drama." Page 41.)

It will not be out of place to mention in this connection that Sir William Ridgeway, F. B. A. Sc. D., considers that Hindu serious Drama arose from the worship of the dead and the Flag-staff is only an emblem of this fact. Dr. S. K. Belvelkar rejects this theory as being not based upon any authorities. (Cal. Review, May 1922, pp. 191). Sir William, however, in his article (Cal. Review 1923, June Pp. 191) supplied us with a mass of evidence in favour of this theory. His main contention is that the ancestor-worship or the worship of the dead is illustrated by the worship of Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Manasha &c. who played a great part in the development of the Hindu Drama. We have carefully gone into the instances mentioned by Sir William but cannot accept his view. We are of opinion that the Hindu Drama originated in merriment and not in the worship of the dead and the most serious dramas of Sanskrit Literature are instances in point.

In the above theatre, the first drama staged was "Samudra-manthana" or Amrita-manthana and was acted very well. The gods were pleased and not only was the stage built by Visvakarman but also there were dialogues and songs.

The next drama staged was "Tripuradaha" for entertain-

*The passage "The plot . . . . Hence" is not found in Keith's book, but has been introduced to make the quotation clear.

ing Mahadeva at the palace of his father-in-law Himalaya (Giriraja) at the time of his marriage with Parvati. As spectator, the Nataraja or Mahanata (Shiva himself) had an opportunity of witnessing as to how the dramatic art originating from him developed till then. It was here that its deficiency in the absence of dancing was noticed. He then asked his pupil Tandu (another name of Nandikeshvara) to introduce different kinds of dancing and different postures (called Pindibandha) he indulged in, while carrying the dead body of his consort Sati when she renounced her life at the sacrifice of Daksha. Thus dancing came to be introduced and from the name of Tandu it was called Tandava Nritya—consisting of Karana, Angahara and Rechakas representing the different postures of the body in various feelings.

The Munis (sages) asked Bharata "why is dancing included in a dramatic performance; acting is quite enough."

To this Bharata said in reply :—

"Dances no doubt do not help a dramatic performance, but beautify it."

Later on at the desire of Parvati, some beautiful dancings called Lasya Nritya (tender and seductive dances) were introduced into dramatic representation. Parvati taught these to the princess Usha—daughter of King Bana. Usha then taught this art to the Gopabalas (milk-maids) at Dvaraka, the residence of her husband, and by them it was communicated to the women of Sourashvtra. Thus the art of dancing spread to the females of various regions.

The Vishn described how the Gopis allured

by the songs of Krishna and his companions (the cowherd boys) gathered around him at night to perform Rāsa dance. This is the origin of Rasalila which has given rise to various melo-dramas and the Jatra-shows in Bengal.

The next drama staged under Bharata's supervision was "Lakshmi-svayamvara"—voluntary selection of the bridegroom by Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, to Narayana, the God of Protection in the Trinity. Here too the stage was built by Visvakarman, Urbashi and other nymphs having given merriment with songs and dances. It is said that Maharaja Pururavas was invited to the palace of Indra where the above drama was performed for the entertainment of the royal guest. Urbashi took the part of Lakshmi; and having been asked during the ceremony before the divine assembly, whom she longed after, Urbashi, in the role of Lakshmi, instead of naming Purushottama (another name of Narayana), as she was trained by Bharata, named Pururavas whose features, grace and attainments greatly attracted her towards him. The gods began to laugh and Urbashi for her fickleness was cursed out from heaven by the dramatist and producer Bharata.

In India which was then called Jambudvipa, dramatic art was introduced by Nahusha, King of the Lunar dynasty who usurped the throne of Indra and extended his conquests upto his dominion, the Svarga (heaven). At the order of the conquering Emperor, Bharata had to send his disciples Kohala, Shandilya, Dhurtita and Vatsya with a number of players of both the sexes who displayed the art sorely against their will before the Indian people.

Some of the actors, however, fell in love with some beauties of the land and begot children who afterwards

formed a separate community of "Nata". Music and dancing was their chief vocation and Kautilya in his 'Arthashastra' classes them as Shudras.

Bharata himself did not come down; Kohala (variously named as Kohala and Kolahala) was the teacher in the earth as the following lines of Natyashastra show:—

आप्तोपदेशसिद्धिश्च नाट्ये प्रोक्ता स्वयम्भुवा ॥ ६४ ॥
शेषमुत्तरतन्त्रेण कोहलः कथयिष्यति ।
भरतानाञ्च वंशोऽयं भविष्यश्च प्रकीर्त्तितम् ॥ ७० ॥
कोहलादिभिरेतैर्वा वात्स्यशाण्डिल्यधूर्तिलैः ।
मर्त्यधर्म्मतया युक्तैः कञ्चित्कालमवस्थितैः ॥ ७१ ॥
एतच्छास्त्रं प्रयुक्तन्तु नराणां बुद्धिवर्द्धनम् ।

नाट्यशास्त्रे षट्त्रिंशोऽध्यायः ।

(Ed. Kasi Sanskrit Series.)

In India, a class of professional musicians are still to be found in some parts of the country, as Nata or Nara who live with their family and children and whose services are sometimes required on festive occasions. Even to-day in the first rice-ceremony of the children of the above community, Banshi (flute) or Dhole (drum) forms chief part of the ceremony as with the higher castes inkpot and pen forms a chief part.

TIME OF BHARATA

As we noticed before, both Kalidas and Bhababhuti have mentioned him. In the 9th century, too, Abhinava Guptacharya wrote Bharata-Natya-vivriti i.e., a commentary on Bharata's Natyashastra. But when did the sage actually flourish?

Panini speaks of Shilali and Krishasa as authors of aphorisms on dramatic art (Natya). Panini in

said to have flourished about 3000 B.C.* Shilali has also been referred to in Sattopatho Brahmana (Sloka 13. 5. 33 which according to famous astronomer Sankara Ram Krishna Dikshita was composed about 4,000 years ago.

Pandit Haraprasad Sastri traces the priority of Bharata's Natyashastra to Panini and would put not later than the 2nd century before Christ as date of its composition. But judging from all accounts it appears that the Natyashastra was composed long before the 5th century B.C. Tradition also puts Bharata as the first writer on the first and the most authoritative treatise on the dramatic art, and Shilali and Krishasheswar seemed to be his contemporaries. Now codification of the art seemed to have been necessitated by a multiplicity of dramas as Aristotle did about the Greek dramas in his poetics, and the 'Natyashastra', too, not only proves the existence of dramas but also gives directions as to how the stage should be built. It is thus certain that if 'Natyashastra' was written 5th century before Christ, Drama and stage were in existence long before that, at a time when Greece did not even hear of either.

The 'Natyashastra' of Bharata is a comprehensive work on dramaturgy. It mainly describes three kinds of stage and auditorium (Prekshagriha) :—

विकृष्टश्चतुरश्रश्च त्र्यश्रश्चैव तु मण्डपः ।
तेषां त्रीणि प्रमाणानि ज्येष्ठं मध्यं तथाऽवरम् ॥ ८ ॥
प्रमाणमेषां निर्दिष्टं हस्तदण्डसमाश्रयम् ।
शतञ्चाष्टौ चतुःषष्टिर्हस्ता द्वात्रिंशदेव वा ॥ ९ ॥

* [Lokomanya Tilak is of opinion that Panini flourished between 3000 and 2500 B. C. But European scholars as usual want to assign comparatively a later date.]

अष्टाधिक शतं ज्येष्ठं चतुषष्टिस्तु मध्यमम् ।
कणीयन्तु तथा वेश्महस्ता द्वात्रिंशदिष्यते ॥ १० ॥
देवानां तु भवेज्ज्येष्ठं नृपाणां मध्यम भवेत् ।
शेषाणां प्रकृतीनां तु कणीयः सां विधीयते ॥ ११ ॥

Natyashastra 2nd Chapter, 9th—11th slokas.

that is, the stage should be either Rectangular, square or mostly in the form of an Equilateral triangle.

(1) Rectangular (Bikrista or *Brittabhaso*) * Length larger than breadth. It may be (1) large 108 by 54 cubits, (2) Medium 64 cubits by 32 cubits, (3) Small 32 cubits by 16 cubits.

(2) Square (chaturasra) length and breadth equal as of a four-sided figure. It may be (1) large 108 cubits each side, (2) medium 64 cubits each side, (3) large 32 cubits each side.

(3) Equilateral Triangle (Twasra), three sided figure, each side being equal to the other. It may be large, each side being 108 cubits or medium 64 cubits or small 32.

The stage and auditorium of the large size was meant for the gods (Devas) and was called divine: the one of medium size was for the kings (Rajas) while the small one was called private i.e., for the people. The medium-sized Rectangular form was considered the best by Bharata, as the following slokas show :—

चतुःषष्टि कराण कुर्य्यात् दीर्घत्वेन मण्डपम् ।
द्वात्रिंशतं च विस्तारान्मर्त्यानाम् यो भवेदिह ॥२।२३ ॥

---

* Not elliptical as maintained by many. Bikrista विकृष्टो is explained by Abhinava Gupta as विभागेन कृष्टो दीर्घो नतु चतुरस्र दिव भावेन i.e not square but rectangular

प्रेक्षागृहाणां सर्व्वेषां तस्मान् मध्यमिष्यते ।
यावत् पाठ्यं च गेयं च तत्र श्रव्यतरं भवेत् ॥२।२३॥

The stage was often a two-storied building. The upper story was meant for the representation of celestial dramatic action and the lower one for that of terrestrial actions. In ancient times the Sangitsala, generally the 'Uthan' or court-yard some-times served the purpose of theatre. The lower part was appropriated for the stage, the upper part was reserved for the King and the Queen and other distinguished male and female personages. The play opened with a prelude, in which the Sutradhara (Manager) introduced the author and the actors to the audience, and informed them of the leading events and past occurrences calculated to illustrate the acts. The first act afforded a clue to the subject of the whole story which was developed in the ensuing acts. The stage itself was called Rangabhumi or nepathya. The following description of it from the Sangita Ratnakara also is appropriate:—"The chamber in which dancing is to be exhibited should be spacious and elegant. It should be covered over by something supported by pillars, rightly decorated and hung with garlands. The Master of the house should take his seat in the centre on a threne; the inmates of the private apartment should be seated on his left, and persons of rank on his right. Behind both are to be seated the chief officers of the State or household, and poets, astrologers, physicians and men of learning are to be arranged in the centre. Female attendants, selected for their beauty and figure, are to be about the person of the principal, with fans and chauris, whilst persons carrying wands are to be stationed to keep order, and armed men, as guards, are to be placed

in different directions. When all are seated, the band is to enter and perform certain airs; after which the chief dancer is to advance from behind the curtain and after saluting the audience, scattering at the same time flowers amongst them, she will display her skill."

Professor MacDonel in his history of Sanskrit Literature mentions that Hindus had no public theatres and dramas used to be represented at the Nrittyashalas or the dancing halls of princes. But the above details given by Bharata about stage-craft and the existence of such a word as "prekshaghara" or Pekhamghara belies the theory and speaks of the independent origin of the Hindu drama and stage. *

Sutradhara, Nati and Nandi are also mentioned in Bharata's Natyashastra.

In that book the following countries and tribes are mentioned:—

Kirata, Barbara, Andhra, Dravida, Kasi, Koshala, Pulinda and Dakshinalya, the inhabitants of which represented in drama should be painted in black. The Sakas, Yavavas, Palilavas and Valikas are to be painted white. The Panchalas, Surasenas, Malisas, Udramagadhas, the Angas, Vangas and Kalingas are to be painted dark-white. Angas, Bangas, Kalingas were also mentioned in Asoka's inscriptions.

The references show the cultural glory of Bengal even in ancient times.

---

* Shekaler Rongaloy by Prof. Asok Nath Bhattacharjee M. A. in his articles in Nanchghara and Weekly Nayok 19th Ashar 2nd 4th Poush 1339

SUTRADHARA

We have a reference of the word sutradhara or the architect of the stage in the Natyashastra. We shall also find the same figure prominent in all dramas of ancient India. The origin of this dramatic person is important. Some scholars are of opinion that as puppet-show (Putulnauch) was in vogue in India and the movements of the dolls or puppets were regulated by the hand with the help of a string (Sutra), the man leading the dolls was called Sutradhara. Prof. Pischel definitely holds the view that Indian drama has evolved out of such puppet shows. He says the puppet-shows having disappeared, in course of time, when the real dramatic literature grew up, the name of the Sutradhara survived. But though we get references of puppet-show in the Mahabharata, and they are still prevalent in the country, it would be equally logical to think that puppet shows might have followed dramatic shows and might have been introduced for the entertainment of the illiterate people, as dramatic performances were intended for the more cultured people. The unavoidable feature of a Sanskrit Drama is that in it the Sutradhara must always appear in the prologue and the actors and actresses move like puppets at his bidding. He is called Sutradhara because the Sutra or the source belongs to him. In the cheap 'putulnanch' also such a man is called Sutradhara, but the holding of the string actually by the hand, might be by an accident.

Some scholars however are of opinion that Sutradhara is derived from Sutras or aphorisms and as Bharata was not only the inventor of dramatic en [illegible] but was also the reputed father of dramatic [illegible] whose Sutras

the commentators constantly cite, Sutradhara as, the thread-holder or dramatic director owes his origin to him.

In present theatres in Bengal, there is no Sutradhara, his place being taken by programmes.

We next propose to discuss certain views about the origin of drama.

Dr. Macdonell says 'Indian drama was developed, it seems, in connection with the cult of Krishna (Vishnu).''* Krishna as a cowherd-boy and his cowherd companions according to Macdonell was the starting point, sangita or music (of course devotional music) being the later development. The Doctor refers in corroboration of his theory to the performance of Lakshmisvayamvara being arranged by Bharata and further holds that Gita-govinda of the 12th Century in which the characters engage in lyrical monologues is the earliest literary specimen of the premitive type of play. Dr. Keith upholds the origin of drama to the combination of epic recitations with the dramatic movement of the Krishna legend in which a Young God strives against and overcomes enemies. † No doubt Bengali Yatras, which we shall deal later on, drew some inspiration from the above source and "Gitagovinda" which formed afterwards the main theme of the jatras owes its origin to the songs and dialogues of Radha-Krishna and cowherd boys and girls, nevertheless it is not correct to say that this was the solitary source of development. As to the earliest dramas that preceded the well-known book 'Gitagovinda" (of the 12th and 13th

* History of Sanskrit Literature, page 347

† Keith's Drama, page 45

century) which however was not a drama, we get non from the Krishna-Vishnu cult except what we find i Mahabhashya. So it can not be the cause of earlier deve lopment, though it might do something for the later. Th Shiva or Durga or Rama-worship were themes giving ris to and adding to the development of similar dramati efforts, both at the earliest and subsequent stages, yet w do not advance any theories, though according to Hind traditional belief Shiva was the Mahanata and He an Durga introduced dancings in the theatre. Similarly w do not propound any new theory though Rama's stor in Ramayana has been so popular in the whole centur that even to-day Ramlila shows are considered to be th only relics of the ancient dramatic shows. Drama i India is the result of growth for centuries and severa agencies—not simply one—have worked and contributed towards its growth and development.

CHAPTER II

LITERARY EVIDENCE ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF INDIAN DRAMA

IN THE RIGVEDA

In Vedic times, too, as in the legendary age, mimic play like the conflict between the Devas and Asuras used to be held during sacrifices and we also notice sufficient dramatic elements iu the Rigveda, particularly in the 10th Mandala. Several passages full of dramatic interests consist in dialogues. In Sukta number 95 of the 10th Mandala, Pururavas mad with grief for Urbashi (the Apsharas or nymph), rebukes her for her inconstancy only to court the following reply :—

"You must not die or throw your-self from the rock. Fierce wolves will then devour you. Women's hearts are like wild hyenas; there can not be any friendship with them."

The story or Pururavas and Urbashi has been related in Shathapatha Brahmana, Harivamsha, Vishnupurana, Kathasaritsagara and forms the subject of Kalidasa's immortal drama Vikramorvashi Trotaka.

Again in the 10th Sukta of the same Mandala, we find Yami in vain trying to seduce her brother Yama to accept her proferred incestuous love to which Yama replies

"Not such an intimacy does thy friend desire etc."

She then abuses him ; but he does not listen to an then when she accuses him of wishing to embrace anothe woman in preference to her, "as the creeper clasps th tree," Yama concludes the dialogue in the followin way :—

Thou, too, O Yami, clasp another
That other thee as the creeper binds the tree
Win thou his love and he wins yours
And then both live in closest tie.

In 1. 165 and 1, 170 Indra disputes with the Marut for deserting him during his contest with the Asuras There is also a similar conversation between Indra and Varuna in 4.42 in the Rigveda from which and othe passages Max Muller and Sylvan Levi have suggeste that the dialogue-poem of the Rigveda might be a kind o drama. In 1869, Max Muller in his version of Rigved (Vol. 1, 165) conjectures that the "dialogue was repeate at the sacrifices in honour of the Maruts or that possibly it was acted by two parties—one representing Indra and the other Maruts and their followers." Prof. Levi agree ing with the argument further adds that the Samaveda shows that the art of music had been fully developed in the Vedic age.* Dr Hertel also says that "Indian Drama is but a growth of the dialogues, and the Vedic hymns represent the beginnings of a dramatic art which may be compared with the form of "Gitagovinda." Prof. Von Schroeder also tries to prove that the *Samvada* hymns ar realy dialogues belonging to some dramatic performance connected with the religious cult, though Prof. H. Olde.

* भूमि कोकं मनौ— १२ ७ १ १५
[illegible] ८ २

burg differs from that view and considers that without epic recitation there could be no drama. Dr. Keith, however, holds : "Period of the Rigveda knew dramatic spectacles, religious in charactor in which the priests assumed the roles of gods and sages in order to imitate on earth the events of the heavens.... The dramas of the ritual therefore are in a sense some what out of the main line of the development of the drama and the popular side has survived through the ages in a rough way in the Yatras, well-known in Bengal, while the refined and sacredotalised Vedic drama passed away without a direct descendant."

(Dr. Keith's Sanskrit Drama P. 16.)

UPANISHADS

In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad we come across excellent conversations of dramatic character between the highly learned lady Vidushi Gargi Vachaknavi and the erudite sage Yajnavalkya and that between the latter and his wife Maitreyi. All these dialogues are about the Absolute :—

"सा होवाच यदूर्ध्वं याज्ञवल्क्य दिवो यदवाक् पृथिव्या यदन्तरा द्यावापृथिवी इमे यद्भूतं च भवच्च भविष्यच्चेत्याचक्षते कस्मिंस्तदोतं च प्रोतं चेति" (बृ० उ० ३।८)।

"सा होवाच मैत्रेयी येनाहं नामृता स्यां किमहं तेन कुर्याम्..." (बृ० उ० २।४)।

"Who holds these land and water?" "What is the good in having that which does not bring nectar—Amrita?"

Similar dialogues are found in other Upanishads also. For example, we may cite the excellent c dialogue Yama and Nachiketa in Katha and that between

Shvetaketu and his father—both of which contain the very essence of all Upanishadic teachings.

Some of the dialogue-hymns are ballads, some are the poetic remnants of a narrative and others are speeches belonging to a ritualistic drama and Dr. Winternitz taking a middle course says—"these contributed as much to the origin of the drama as to the origin of the epic."

POST-VEDIC PERIOD

Next, Dr. Hertel, according to whom the beginnings of the drama in India were to be sought in the dramatic rituals connected with the Vedic hymns and dialogues, seeks to find an actual drama of the Post-Vedic Period keeping up the continuity of the pre-Vedic times, but Dr. Keith holds a different view. Says Dr. Keith:—"His (Dr. Hertel's) great effort to find a full drama in the Suparnadhyaya must definitely be pronounced a failure. ,..........a late imitation of Vedic work proper, it had neither any dramatic intention or use."*

We have already shown that the famous grammarian Panini refers to two schools of dramaturgy as propounded by Shilalin and the other by Krishashva.

पाराशर्य्यशिलालिभ्यां भिक्षुनटसूत्रयोः । ४।३।११०
कर्म्मन्दकृशाश्वादिनिः । ४।३।१११

Since Shilalin and Krishashva introduced Natasutras, Shailalin and Krishashvin mean an actor. In Valmiki's Ramayana, Ayodhyakanda (II. 30. 8) we find that "Shailusha" is used in the sense of an actor in the following sloka:—

स्वयं तु भार्य्यां कौमारीं चिरमध्युषितां सतीम् ।
शैलूष इव मां राम परेभ्यो दातुमिच्छसि ॥

* Dr. Keith's Sanskrit Drama, Page 21.

In the Vajasaneyi Samhita, (वाजसनेयी संहिता), Shukla Yajurneda, 30.6, we find the following passage—

"नृत्ताय सूतं गीताय शैलूष—"

Commentator Mahidhara (महीधर) explains the term शैलूषं (Shailusham) as नटम् (Natam or actor)—as in—

"शैलूषं नटम्—महीधर।"

This also proves that Natas or actors were in vogue in the Vedic period.

In Valmiki's Ramayana also, we find references of Natakas, Nata and Sangita and Dr. Keith is not right in saying that there is no trace of any drama there. In Ayodhyakanda we find that prince Bharata (भरत) who at the time of Rama's exile and King Dasharatha's death, lived in his maternal uncle's house, felt sad on account of bad dreams, quite ignorant of the tragic events happening at his paternal house. His friends and associates then tried to cheer him up with their songs, dancings and by reading joyous comedies or Natakas (Dramas) :—

वादयन्ति तदा शान्ति लासयन्त्यपि चापरे।
नाटकान्यपरे स्माहुर्हास्यानि विविधानि च।

II. 69. 4.

After Bharata was brought home, he was immediately raised to the throne at the instance of Markandeya and other Rishis because they said the following in the course of narrating the evils of anarchy, viz :—

नाराजके जनपदे प्रहृष्टनटनर्त्तकाः।
उत्सवाश्च समाजाश्च वर्द्धन्ते राष्ट्रवर्द्धनाः॥

II 67 15

"In the anarchical state, those festivities that contribute to the pleasure of Natas and dances become rare."

The Ramayana in the course of its description of the city mentions theatres for females in Ayodhya. वधूनाटकसङ्घैश्च संयुक्ता सर्वतः पुरीम् * It is also mentioned that Rama along with other subjects read Nataka written in mixed languages—श्रैष्ठ्यं शास्त्रसमूहेषु प्राप्तो व्यामिश्रकेषु च (२।१।२७) Of course there is no further reference to drama in the Ramayana, but the recitation of this great epic, generation after generation, exercised a great influence on the development of the drama itself. Valmiki taught his great poem to his two pupils Kusha and Lava (Twin sons of Rama and Sita). They sang and recited those immortal verses before the people of Ayodhya even in the presence of Rama.

Dr. Keith however admits this influence of the Ramayana on our dramatic development. Indeed both Bhasa and Bhavabhuti have acknowledged the debt of their dramas they owed to the Ramayana. The word 'Kushilava' means an actor, or a bard and certainly the word has been derived from Kusha and Lava of the Ramayana. According to the majority of the oriental scholars, the Ramayana was completed at a time when the inner kernel of the Mahabharata had not assumed a definite shape. The heroes of the Mahabharata are not mentioned in the Ramayana, whereas the story of the Ramayana has often been alluded to in the Mahabharata. Hence the original part of the Ramayana could not on any authority be composed later than 500 B.C. though we may put its date at least several thousands of years before the birth of Christ.

---

* Adikanda, Chap. V., Sloka 12.

In the Mahabharata, we find references of a big stage in the Virata Parva. When the Pandavas, banished from their kingdom, were living in incognito, in the court of king Viratā, the great hero, Arjuna, then known as Brihannala, in the guise of an eunuch, taught princess Uttara (the daughter of Virata) songs, dancings and instrumental music which he had learnt from Gandharva Chitrasena at the desire of Indra. At the marriage of Uttara with Abhimanyu (Arjuna's son) Natas, Vaitalikas, Sutas, Maghadas (actors, bards, musicians and dancers) entertained the honoured guests. In Vana-Parva of the Mahabharata, king Yudhisthira in answer to the questions put by Dharma said, that for good name he had made occasional payments to the actors and dancers. In the *Udyoga* Parva, we find that when Shri Krishna went to the palace of Duryodhona as ambassador to Yudhisthira, Duryodhana either for his liberal hospitality, or for showing his own pomps arranged for the entertainment of Sri Krishna at every place of importance. Indeed this much is certain, that with time the epic poetry of the Hindus gradually assumed a dramatic aspect by way of dialogues, and sanskrit drama evolved itself out of the lyric and epic forms, just as the Greek dramas followed the Homeric poems.

In Srimad Bhagvat Purana, reference has been made to actors (Skanda 1, chapter XI, Sloka 21) where Vasudeva and other citizens gave a fitting reception to Sri Krishna when the latter made a state-entry to the capital at Dvaraka :—

नटनर्त्तकगन्धर्व्वाः सूतमागधबन्दिनः ।

गायन्ति चोत्तम   च ॥

Dr. Keith says that Nata (नट) might mean a pantomimist but the famous commentator Shridharswamin explains Nata as Navarashabhinayachatura i.e. one who is clever and versed in the display of various (nine) kinds of Rasa, रस *i.e.* in a word, a skilful actor.

In the other Puranas, too, we find references of dramatic representations. In the Harivamsha, Pradyumna, son of Sri Krishna, is mentioned as having appeared in the role of an actor in company of other Yādavas when he stole away Prabhavati, the daughter of the demon-king Vajranabha.

In the Markandyeya Purana, we find Ritadhvaja alias Kuvalayashva, the son of king Shatrajit, fond of dramatic performances (Natakabhinaya) and passing his days delightfully in cultivation of poetry, music, dramas and dramatic representations.

कदाचित् काव्यसंलापगीतनाटकसम्भवैः ।
रेमे नरेन्द्रपुत्रोऽसौ नरेन्द्रतनयैः सह ॥

मार्कण्डेयपुराणे विंशोऽध्यायः ।

Besides the above references, we also find regular dramas of two great dramatists Bhasa and Shudraka, who flourished in the 4th century and in the 3rd century before Christ. As these dates require elucidation, we propose to deal with those in the next chapter.

Koutilya in his famous Arthashastra, written about the fourth century before Christ, prohibited the Brāhmana from acting on account of the evil influence it exercised on them for the presence of actresses. Bhasa, the great dramatist, who flourished in the fourth century before Christ, has been quoted by Koutilya in his Artha shāstra.

In the Manusamhita, a particular class has been mentioned in reference to acting:

नटश्च करणश्चैव" (मनु १०।२२)

Both during the time of Panini and his annotator, Patanjali, the more cultured section ((शिष्ट) of the people used to talk in Sanskrit and the ordinary class in Prakrit. The root 'Nat', (lit to act and dance) apparently the prakritised form of the Sanskrit root Nrit, has been referred to both in Panini who flourished not later than the 5th Century B. C., but who might have flourished as early as the 8th or 7th century B.C., and Patanjali.

Patanjali (Circa 150 B.C.) in his famous commentary on Panini—Mahabhashya—refers to Kamsabadha and Balibandha (i.e. the slaying of Kamsa and the binding of Bali) in passages like—'they cause the death of Kamsa,' 'they cause the binding of Bali, (III. 1. 26, III. 2. 111). Weber and Dr. Keith hold that these passages might refer to pantomimic killing and binding by Shaubhikas or Shobhanikas. "The use of the causative is explained by this fact; if Bali and Kamsa were persons of to-day, the simple verb would explain their binding and slaying; because it is mere actors, the causative is used and its use denotes that the act is not now real but an exposition of a past act." (Sanskrit Drama. p. 33)

Dr. Keith opines that these Shobhanikas used to represent the act of killing and binding by action only, without any word. The painters, on the other hand, used to describe the acts by their paintings. And a third type—the Granthikas—used to describe the acts verbally To contrast with the Shobhanikas, they used words only and not action But Dr Keith does not

press his point further to establish his thesis that Patanjali here refers to pantomimic acting only and does not allude to drama proper ; for he is evidently in doubt as to the exact mode of their acting. As he himself says—"Did they also use dialogue ?" There is nothing in the passage either to show that they did, or that they did not." (Sanskrit Drama, p. 34).

Prof. Luders, on the other hand, holds that these Shaubhikas were persons who explained to the audience shadow-pictures. Winternitz supports him but Dr. Keith rejects this view as one "which has not even the merit of Indian tradition."

The traditional view is recorded by Kaiyata the commentator of Patanjali who flourished about a 1000 years after the great Grammarian. Prof. Levi renders it as meaning that the Shaubhikas are those who teach actors "(नटानां व्याख्यानोपाध्यायाः)". Luders explains the expression saying that the Shaubhikas explained to the audience dumb actors—"a form of drama which is recorded as performed by the Jhamkis of Bombay and Mathura in modern India."

Patanjali is now definitely known to have been a contemporary of Pushyamitra, the Commander-in-chief of Brihadratha, the last of the Mauryas. He slew Brihadratha about 185 B.C., usurped his kingdom, founded the Sunga dynasty and repelled the invasion of the Greek king Menander alias Milinda in 175 B.C. So Patanjali may be safely placed in the 2nd cent. B. C.

From Patanjali we get further mention about actors. That their wives, who served as actresses, were evidently of low morale is illustrated by the following passage .—

तद्यथा नदानाम् स्त्रियो रङ्गं गता यो य. पृच्छति कस्य यूयम् कस्य यूयमिति तं तं तवेत्याहु एवं व्यञ्जनान्यपि यस्य यस्याचः कार्य्यमुच्यते तं तं भजन्ते ।

महाभाष्य तृतीय अध्याय ७म पृ०

Indeed the reputation of actors and actresses was low and unsavoury; they were reputed to live on the price of their wives' honour (Jayajiva, rupajiva) and Manu imposes only a minor penalty on illicit connection with the wife of an actor on the score of their willingness to hand-over their wives to others and profit by their dishonour.

नैष चारणदारेषु विधिर्नात्मोपजीविषु ।

सज्जयन्ति हि ते नारीर्निगूढाश्चारयन्ति च ॥ इति मनु ८।३६२

In the Ramayana also, we find an actor (Shailusha) handing over his wife to another :—

शैलूष इव मां राम परेभ्यो दातुमिच्छसि ।

On the other hand, references to the higher side of the profession are also found in ancient Sanskrit Literature.

We shall never omit to refer to those in the proper place.

IN THE BUDDHISTIC PERIOD

It was during the Buddhistic period that Sanskrit drama reached its high water-mark of perfection. Buddhism brought no foreign rule, nor introduced any alien culture, but was only a side-issue of Hinduism that in the beginning tried to emancipate religion from a number of so-called cruel rites and meaningless rituals and whatever change and degradation the creed itself underwent with time, Buddhism at first was but a branch of pure Hinduism · it bore almost just the relation that Martin Luther's Reformation bore to the Roman Catholic

religion of the Medieval Europe. Buddha is regarded by some as one of the ten Avataras of Vishnu. The earliest Buddhist monks were stern in many things and they were neither disgusting puritans nor averse to drama or dramatic representation. So drama found opportunity to evolve its growth during the Buddhistic period.

The Buddhist ballads also, like Vedic hymns, are according to some scholars, little dramas and it is too late to enter into the discussion that they are not so. There are a number of dramatic references in Buddhistic Literature and we shall notice only a few here.

In the oldest Buddhistic writings, witnessing Dramatic performance has been often spoken of something as usual. 'Lalitavistara" speaks of Buddha—that while, in Rajagriha his disciples Maudgalayana and Upatisva showed their dramatic skill in the several exhibitions of spectacle and shows. (Asiatic Researches xx p. 50).

Dr. Weber also says in his Dramatic History of the world "In the Lalitavistara, appropos of the testing of Buddha in the various sciences, Natya, most undoubtedly is taken in the sense of mimetic art and so Foucaux translates it :"

We have further that Bimbisara, the King of Magadha had a drama performed in honour of a pair of Nāga Kings. Next, under the direction of Gautama, the Buddha himself, a drama was performed at Rajagriha. Kubalaya was at this time the most charming actress and acquired great reputation for her dramatic skill. As, however, she seduced some of the monks, she was turned by Lord Buddha into a hideous old woman on account of this sinful act. She then repented her folly and was

afterwards raised to the rank of a saint through the grace of the Lord Buddha. Indeed, we agree with Dr. Keith, that there is a close connection of religion and the drama and it was from religion that decisive impulse was given to dramatic creation.

The Jātaka legends, too, considered to belong to 3rd century B. C. abound with innumerable instances of 'Nata' and 'Nataka' :

In Book XX No. 531 (Kusajataka), we find the expression :—"Datv nāṭakāni upattha pessāma— Bhadde puttassa te rajjam La—" Lady, in making over the Kingdom to your son we would institute dramatic festivities.

In part IV 67 (Udaya Jataka) Book XI No. 458, occurs—'Raja puttaṁ abhisincitva nāṭakāni' ssa. Paccupatthapessām.

"The king desired to make his son king with the solemn sprinkling and to arrange plays for his pleasure."

"Natakani" in the above passages mean plays and dramatic performances. The Jātakas also speak about actors. Part VI 102 (Book XXII No. 543) has—"Nagas look at a crowd for two reasons to see whether any garula is near or any actors."

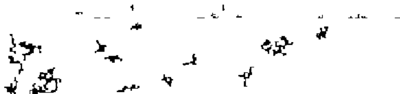
Jataka Book III 287 has the following :—"of the Four who gain—one is that has an actor's tricks."

The most pro t mention of dramatic exahibrtion has been given in Kanavera Jataka where an

It is said that Bodhisatta was born as a notorious robber when king Brahma-Dutta reigned in Benares. To relieve the people of his incendiarsm, the King ordered him to be decapitated. There was however a courtesan Shama by name. She was beautiful and skilled in arts and her fee of each visit was 1000 rupees. The King loved her and she had a great influence over him. She sent one of her admirers, a rich and fair young merchant with Rs. 1000/- to the Governor to release the robber whom Shama fell in love with. The robber was sent to Shama, but the youngman was executed instead. Shama then gave up her profession and began to live day and night with the robber. The latter however left her very soon thinking that he too might have the same fate as the young rich lover. Shama grew restless over her lover and resolved to recover him by any means. She sent for some actors and gave them a thousand pieces of money. On their asking what are they to do for the lady.—"Nate, pakkosapetva sahassaiṁ adasi kim karomo Ayye mtivutte"
to this she replied—

> "tuṁhākaṁ agamanaṭṭhānaṁ
> namar' atthi tumhe gāmanigamarāja-
> dhāniya gantā samajaṁ katvā samajjamaṇḍale
> paṭhamameva imaṁ gītaṁ gāyeyyāthā" te
> Bārāṇasito Nikkhamitvā tattha tatha Samajjaṁ
> Karontā Ekaṁ paccantagāmakaṁ Gamiṁsee.
> Te tattha Samajjaṁ Karontā paṭhamaṁ eva
> gītakaṁ gāyiṁsa."

"There is no place that you do not visit—Go then to every village town and city and gathering a crowd



around you on a pavillion of theatre or sabha, sing the following song in the midst of the people:

Shama lives and lives for thee.
She loves thee and thee alone.

Bodhisatta, however, did not return and Shama in despair went back to the girls of her former profession and carried on that again. Natas here are actors, Samaja means theatrical shows and Samajamandala the stage.

(Book No. IV p. 318 Part III)

The word Samaja as a theatrical performance occurs often in the Buddhistic literature.

First Rock Edict of Girnar Rock reads thus along with other lines:—

न च समाजो कटव्यो वहुकम् हि दोषम्
समाजमहि पशति देवानां प्रियो प्रियदर्शि राजा
अस्ति पि तु एकचा समाजा साधुमता देवानां पियस

Dr. Hultzsch the commentator has not properly interpreted the word Samaja here, but Dr. D. R. Bhandakar has given a correct explanation with illustrations that Samaja (i. e. a public feast where meat formed one of the principal articles of food served) was not to the liking of Ashoka; where however the word Samaja is synonymous with Ranga, Prekshaghara, (i. e. where it means a concourse of the people assembled), and actors, dancers and musical instruments were brought in to feast their eyes and ears, i. e. where it means a Sangha or a dramatic performance, it was liked by Ashoka * (considered साधुमत)

* Dr s article A Vol. XIII of 1913 pages

The word 'Samaja' occurs in Ramayana as we have seen in page 27. Whatever meaning might be given in the epic, the word was used by Vatsyayana वातसायन in his Kamasutra—a work considered so old as the Fifth century B.C. where the words Natakas, prekshanam, Kushilava occur prominently:—

e. g.—(1) गीतम्, वाद्यम्, नृत्यम्, आलेख्यम् .. ..नाटकाख्यायिका-दर्शनम्—

(कामशास्त्रे प्रथमाधिकरणे तृतीयोऽध्यायः)

(2). पक्षस्य मासस्य वा प्रज्ञातेऽहनि सरस्वत्या भवने नियुक्तानां नित्यं समाजः। कुशीलवाश्चागन्तवः प्रेक्षणकमेषां दद्युः। द्वितीयेहनितेभ्यः पूजा नियतं लभेयन्। ततो यथाश्रद्धमेषां दर्शनमुत्सर्गो वा। व्यसनोत्सवेषु चैषां परस्परस्यैककार्यता।

आगन्तूणां च कृतसमवायानां पूजनमभ्युपपत्तिश्च। इति गणधर्म्मः।

(कामशास्त्रे प्रथमाधिकरणे चतुर्थोऽध्यायः)

"On some particular auspicious day, an assembly of citizens should be convened in the temple of Sareswati. Here the skill of singers, actors, and of others who may have come recently to the town should be tested and on the following day they should be given some rewards. After that, they may either be retained, or dismissed according as performances are liked or not by the assembly."

"Prekshanakam" (performance) relates to Preksha-griha as described at length by Bharata in his Natya Shastra II-8.

"Samaja" here is representation of a drama and is evident from its association with the words 'Kushilava' and 'prekshanon.'

That Ashoka liked dramatic performance (समाज) is illustrated by the fact that the oft-quoted Sitabenga cave

showing a stage in it related probably to the time of Ashoka. From this also the inference is possible that 'samaja' in Girnar Rock-edict of Ashoka means a dramatic performance

The ascendency of drama during the Buddhistic period has further been demonstrated by the discovery of fragments of manuscripts of three dramas on palm leaves of great antiquity at Turfan in Central Asia. Professor Luders has translated these and one of the above dramas is Sariputra-Prakarana by Asvaghoshas, son of Suvarnakshi and the author of Buddhacharita and Sutralankara.

The Drama Suriputra-Prakarana treats of the conversion of young Maudgalayana and Sariputra by the Buddha. Maudgalayana asks Sariputra how he, a Brahmin, would accept a Khastriya as his teacher. Sariputra says—"medicine given by a Shudra may heal the sick—." Maudgalyana greets him and they both go to Buddha who prophesies that they will be highest in knowledge. The last chapter describes a philosophic dialogue between Buddha and Sariputra.

The discovery of the above fragments shows how drama attained a definite and complete form by the 1st Century B. C., the recognised time of Asvaghosha. The drama is in 9 acts and illustrates the main types of dramas. It further shows that there must have been a number of dramas, preceding and following the Natyashastra as we have seen before, enabling the author to codify the technique and the rules that guide dramas of various types.

ARCHÆOLOGICAL FVIDENCE

Now we come to archæological evidence that we find

scattered over the length and breadth of India, in imperishable stones. Archæology takes us back to the "specious times" of Ashoka the great—a celebrated Budhist King whose palace was at Pataliputra (Patna) one hundred and ten years after the decease of Shakya. He conquered many provinces and the era of Ashoka had left its marks on the pages of the world's history. By that time trade and communication between India and Greece were fully established and happy relationship existed between these two great countries as a result of treaty concluded between Chandra Gupta and Selucus, the Great general of Alexander the great.

About 75 years ago, Colonel J. R. Ouseley discovered two caves inscribed with Ashoka characters (Shilālipi) in the Ramgarh Hills in the Lakhanpura Zemindari of the Sirguja Estate in the central provinces of India.

The place is about 100 miles from Kharshia Ry. Station of the B. N. Railway and would be about 2000 feet high above the sea level. There is a very old temple in the locality almost in ruins where the deity Raghunath (Ram Chandra) is still worshipped. There are also other small temples in ruins wherein are found images of Shiva, Ashtabhuja, (lit. with eight arms—Durga) Sita, Lakshan and Mahabira. Melas and fairs are held every year when pilgrims from different parts of India come. Towards the north of the hill there is a big passage about 180 feet in length and so wide that an elephant with riders can easily pass through it. The tunnel or the passage is thus known as "Hathipole." In the same hill towards the West are two caves facing the West. The northern cave is called the "Sitabenga" and the Southern one "Jogimara." In 1894 Dr. Theodore Bloch visited the

caves and took photos of the sites, and of all the impressions and inscriptions therein. These on examination were found to relate to drama and poetry. Other travellers, like Mr. Boyre, who preceded the Doctor, took those to be the abode of the saints and yogis, but Dr. Theodore Bloch discovered the following historical truths from the inscriptions and different impressions, found in those caves.

The first cave "Sitabenga", named after Sita, the wife of Rama, resembles in all details the plan of "a small Greek amphitheatre." In the caves are found holes in which wooden pillars were fixed for hanging screens, and outside are found remains of seats rising upstairs and arranged in semi-circles confirming the idea of accommodation for about fifty persons or upwards. Sitabenga is 46 feet by 24 feet. In front (outside) there were some rows of raised seats of stones. Inside the cave there are three rows of raised seats on the three sides. Each raised platform was 2½ feet in height and 7 feet in breadth. There are reasons to believe that during the spring, autumn and the summer, spectators enjoyed dramatic representations from outside, but in the rains and winter they had to take shelter inside the cave. The following inscription has been found in the Sitabenga cave in the two lines, 3ft 8″ long while each letter measures 2½ inches in average.

1. Adi payamti hedayam—
   Sabhaba gara Kavayo e ratayam ....
2. Dib vasam tiya Hasavana bhute
   Kudasphatam evam alam ga.*

* This second line contains several letters which can not be clearly read such as K   may be read as K   also.

In the opinion or Dr. Bloch, the inscription means, the poets are to be honoured, they stir up our hearts. When in the full moon of the spring, songs and witty jokes appertaining to Doljatra-festival go on all round, the people swell in joy by putting on Jasmine garlands around their necks.

In the spring, Doljatra or the Swing-festival of Lord Krishna during full moon is a very great festive occasion for the Hindus. Dr. Bloch says therefore it was a place where poetry was recited, love-songs were sung and theatrical performances held. In short, we may look upon it as the ruins of an Indian Theatre of 3rd century B. C.

The following writings have been found in the Jogimara cave :

1. "Shutanuka nama"—Sutanuka by name.
2. "Devdashikyi"—a dancing girl or a temple dancer.
3. "Shutanukanama devadashikyi"—Shutanuka by name, a temple-dancer.
4. "Tam Kamayitha balansheye"—Her beloved he of Baranashi (Beneras)*
5. "Devadinenama lupadakhe"—Devadinna (Devadatta) by name skilled in forms.†

* This line is differently interpreted by Boyer, Bloch, Dr A. Banerjee, Shastri and Dr. S. K. Chatterjee. Some read "balunasheye." It is not necessary to dilate on the point here.

† [illegible] Bloch interprets the word as 'skilled in painting.' [illegible] mean 'artiste en statues.' Pischel makes it 'Kopist.' Poet Rabindranath Tagore and Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee tried to use the word in the sense of an artist. Dr. Chatterjee, however seems to be in doubt as to exact significance of the term. He translates it as "skilled in forms—(painter or sculptor ? skilled in figures or accountancy)". Profs' Surendranath Muzumdar Shastri and Ashokanath Bhattacherya Shastri have suggested the meaning "actor". This seems to be the most plausible interpretation.

In the Minindpanho, there is a word "Rupadakkha" which may be sanskritised as "Rupadaksha". But there 'Rupadakkha' has an altogether different significance i.e. "Judge", as RhysDavids points out. Even in that context Rhys Davids is not sure of its exact significance. The word does not occur anywhere else in the whole range of Sanskrit or Prakrit Literature, hitherto known to us.

Dr. Block interprets these disjointed writings by putting those together as below :—"Sutanuka devadasi who was head of dancing girls meant for the performances lived in this cave and she fell in love with an actor or an expert in setting as artist—Devadinna by name." The above shows that either stories of love were appreciated by people or the artist himself described his tale of deep love with the actress Sutanuka.

On the roof of Jogimara, there are still some pictures of the following :—

1. A man is seated under a tree with dancing girls and musicians on the left and a procession on the right.
2. A man's picture and some geometrical figures.
3. A man's picture with flowers, cloth and horse.
4. A naked person seated with three attendants with cloths.
5. On another side, two persons seated, three attendants, an elephant by the side of a window of a house and three persons standing.

The Jogimara has also a raised platform on which probably poems were recited.

The Sitabenga inscription is in verse and evidently the composition of some poet.

There are indications to show that poetical recitations were also held in the caves. Thus indications of poetry, art and performances were plainly visible in those two caves discovered by Dr. Bloch, which were regarded by him to be of Greek origin, but the poems and writings

clearly indicate their independent origin and their genuine originality.

From the above archæological discovery of the stage* like 'Greek amphitheatre' some critics might infer that the earliest trace of the Indian stage dates after the advent of the Greeks, that the Hindus had no theatre of their own and they owe it to the civilised Greeks. Dr. Bloch also says that "it is probable that if the Indians became acquainted with Greek Theatres, the suitability of the arrangement of these must have led them to adopt similar structures for their own places of amusement." One might, even, uphold the notorious Windisch theory, "that the curtain was called Yavanika after the Greeks because it took the place of the painted scenery at the back of the Greek stage." Professor Luders, however, does not accept this view † though he admits the connection between the Indian drama and the Greek Mimus. We should, however, at once speak to the critics that if they care to go through the elaborate description of the stage and the auditorium in the Natya-shastra, the earliest text of the Hindus on this subject, and also care to follow impartially the abundant references to dramatic performances in various books of hoary antiquity, they will have to reserve their judgment and will be satisfied beyond doubts about the independent origin of the Indian stage. We have given an acccount of the earliest stage from "Sangita Ratnākara" in page 18 and further we have seen that Bharata's Natyashastra, the earliest authority extant on the subject, gives a comprehensive description of the Indian stage and auditorium in details and such an

* *Vide* Dr. Theodore Bloch's report in the Archæological Survey of India 1903—1904.

† Journal of the German Oriental Society Vol. I—VII page 867.

elaborate and comprehensive treatise on dramaturgy could never be written if there were no dramatic institutions in the land long before the composition of such books. "Natya-shastra" not only mentions three main types of play-houses* as we mentioned before, but gives their measurements and classification of the seats in the auditorium according to different castes. Different quarters or seats were assigned to the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas. Vaishyas, and the Sudras.

Just in front of the auditorium stood the stage decorated with pictures and beautiful reliefs, generally eight cubits square. The Natya-shastra lays down specially that "a play-house should have the form of a cave and and have two stories," similar to the Sitabenga cave discovered by Dr. Bloch at Ramgarh.

काष्ठ्यैयसं प्रतिद्वार द्वारविद्धं न कारयेत् ।
कार्यः शैलगुहाकारो द्विभूमिर्नाट्यमण्डपः ॥ २।६९

Indeed, the discovery of the stage with auditorium in the caves is only an illustration of the rules enunciated in Natyashastra the oldest book probably of the time of Valmiki. Dr. Bloch's use of the expression "Greek amphitheatre" is rather misleading.

As a matter of fact we find traces of dramatic representations in the cave inscription of Nasik during the time of Siri Pulumayi (2nd century A. D) and in the Hatigumpha inscription † of Kharavela of Kalinga (2nd century B. C.)‡

* Play houses are of eighteen types in all—Vide Abhinaba bibriti. Baroda Ed. P.

† The inscription is written in Prakrit prose.

‡ Journal of Behar and Orissa Society 1917 p. 455.

But the oppositionists would still harp on the word "Yavanika."

YAVANIKA

The above word which means a curtain is the sheet anchor for a class of critics who think 'Hindu Theatre was borrowed from the Greeks.' These critics, of whom E. Windisch is the chief, hold that Yavanika points to its Greek origin as being derived from Ionian or Greek but they are only building castles in the air as not only there was no curtain in Greek stage at all, but also no drama either of Bhasa or Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti or Sudraka made any mention of Yavanika which for the first time we find in Karpurmanjari, a drama entirely in Prakrit, of 10th century A. D. by the dramatist Rajashekhara. Long before this, Kalidasa spoke of Javani-women in the second canto of Shakuntala. They were maids-attendants of king Dushhyanta and they could dance well as in—

> एसो वाणासह इथाहिं जवनीहिं वनपुष्पमाला धाविनीति—
> परिघुदो इदो एव्वो आ अच्छदि पि अव अस्मो
>
> द्वितीय अङ्क पाठान्त

Greek Geographers* mention about slave girls amongst other commodities. Wines, musician boys and fine women were imported into India for the satisfaction of the prince of Barygaza (present Broach) and Yavanis were probably such women. These Yavoni women used to hold royal umbrellas over the heads of the Hindu kings and in dramatic performances they used to draw aside the dissected curtain to her side. We get further reference in Kalidas's Raghubansha of Javonis meaning the women

* Periplus of the Erythree an Sea.

of Persia conquered by King Raghu in his Digbijoya—conquest of different countries. "यवनीमुखपद्मानां" रघु—५। Panini refers to Yavana as in—

इन्द्रवरुणभवशर्वरुद्र मृडहिमारण्य यव यवन मातुलाचार्य्याणामानुक ४।१।९

"यवयाश्लिप्याम्" यवनानालिपिः यवनानी—

In Ramayana Sugrib sent his attendants to different places to search Sita as in :—

एतान् म्लेच्छान् पुलिन्दाश्च
काम्बोज-यवनांश्चैव शकानां पत्तनाणि च।

विशङ्काजाकाण्ड ४३सर्ग

Mahabharata speaks of the Yabanas being descended from Nandini the cow of Vashista. Māndhātā मान्धाता also speaks of the Yabanas in the same book.

यवनाः किराता गान्धाराश्चीनाः शवरवर्व्वराः।

शान्तिपर्व्व ६४ अध्याय।

This was followed in Haribansha and Brahmhanonda Purāna speaks of the Javanas having shaved their hairs and Malavikagnimitra of Kalidas further speaks of Yavanas having attacked the army of King Pushyamitra when he crossed the other side of the Indus. The Javanas were believed to be descendants of Turbashoor and lived in the regions on the western banks of the Indus (Purvas). Bacstria was very likely the abode of them. The Aryans used to call all people but them and those of them that used to despise their own religion and custom, as Javanas as a few years ago people of advanced ideas used to be called Khristāns by the more orthodox people.

Our readers would be further surprised to learn that the word Javonika was purely of Hindu origin. The word "J " (Jam anta) means a and is but

another name for "Javonika, 'm' being sometimes colloquially changed into 'b' in pronunciation.

Dr. Keith also is emphatic that the Greek influence behind the Hindu stage is foolish. This is what he says :—

"More value attaches to the argument from the use of Yavanika or its Prākrit form Javanika for the name of the curtain which covered the tiring room and formed the back ground of the stage. The word primarily is an adjective meaning Ionian, the Greeks, with whom India first came into contact. But it was not confined to what was Greek in the strict sense of the word; it applies to anything connected with the Hellenized Persian Empire, Egypt, Syria, Bactriā and it therefore can not be rigidly limited to what is Greek. As applied to the curtain it is an adjective and describes doubtless the material of the curtain (Pati, apati) as foreign, possibly as Levi suggests, Persian tapestry brought to India by Greek ships and merchants. The word Yavonika has no special application to the curtain of the theatre as would be the case if it were borrowed as a detail of stage-management from Greece. Nor in fact was there any curtain in the case of Greek drama so far as is known, from which it could be borrowed; Windisch's contention merely was that the curtain was called Greek because it took the place of painted scenery at the back of the Greek stage.

"As little can any conclusion of Greek borrowing be drawn from the Yavonis—Greek maidens—who are represented as among the body guards of the King; for this the Greek drama offers no parallel; it represents the fondness of the princes of India for the fascinating

hetaerae of Greece and the readiness of Greek traders to make high profits to be derived from shipping these youthful cargoes."

Page 61-62 A. B. Keith 1924.

It is quite possible without any prejudice to Greek advancement in the matter of dramas that both countries Greece and India might have made sufficient progress in the matter; as Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the Great Savant of Science and Professor Marconi invented the principles of wireless telegraphy from two different poles at the same time. Many a German scholars have established a close relation between India and Greece at the Buddhistic influence on the principles of Pythagoras, though the latter might have been found out independently of Indian origin, as much as Mediæval Europe might have created fools without any idea of Hindu Vidushakas of the ancient Indian Dramas. When the stage itself was in a highly advanced stage of development, the word Yavanika might have crept into the dramatic code of India independently of any borrowing from outside. That we do not hear of the word before the drama of Karpurmonjari by Raj-Shekhara in the 12th century A. D., is enough proof of the late introduction of the word into the dramas of India.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF AN INDIAN DRAMA:

KALIDAS

If we now look into the spirit and structure of the world-renowned dramas of Bhasa, Kalidas and others and compare them with those of the Greeks, we shall be absolutely convinced about the independent origin of the Indian drama.

The following are the chief characteristics of the Sanskrit dramas in general and Natakas in particular :—

(i) The Entire absence of tragedy :—

The Greek dramas are predominantly tragic ; but tragedy, is totally absent in sanskrit literature. The elaborate technicalities of sanskrit Dramaturgy intervened, and the result is the total absence of every kind of tragedy from sanskrit. It is idle to suppose that a supreme artist like Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti could not turn out a successful tragedy. Both Shakuntala and Uttararamacharita have carefully avoided being sombre tragedies. Bhasa's dramas too are anything but tragic in spirit, except "Urubhanga" which ends with death of Durjodhana. This too is no exception to the general character of Sanskrit drama, for the death of Durjodhana who was rightly served for his misdeeds does not produce any grief in the minds of the audience.

(ii) Nothing indecent to be presented on the stage.

This dramaturgical injunction did not stop with removing all vulgar things from the stage, but at the same time it put a stop to many innocent things, which might well give a relief to the play. Even kisses and embraces were forbidden on the ancient Sanskrit stage. And we believe that it stood as an impediment to the healthy growth of drama in its manifold phases. Even witticisms were sometimes regulated by the canons of dramaturgy. So from the very nature of things a Sophocles or an Aristophanes must be absent from Sanskrit. Even there were forms of expressing amorous emotions. What wonder is there if Sanskrit dramas being hemmed in all sides by such conventional restraints failed to attain the sublime plane of Greek tragedy. But all honour to the great Hindu dramatists who labouring under such disadvantages and unresonable restrictions could turn out dramas that have drawn unstinted admiration of the civilised world. Some of these rules we shall presently notice.

(iii) The famous classical rule of the Greek trinity i. e. unity of time, unity of place and unity of action, was never observed in India. But there were Panchasandhis or five essential knots or junctures in a Sanskrit drama, absent in Greek dramaturgy :—Mukham, Pratimukham, Garbha, Bimarsha and Upasanhara मुखम्, प्रतिमुखम्, गर्भः विमर्षः, उपसंहारः ।

(iv) The dominant sentiment of the Nataka should be either Erotic or heroic.

All other sentiments found subordinate place in the Nataka.

(v) Abundance of lyrics and lyrical sentiments for which a drama sometimes suffers from want of action. As the third Act of Bhavobhuti's Uttaram-Charita, from the entire absence of dramatic action, appears more like a gorgeous poem than drama, in the strict sense of the word, though of course it contains passages of great beauty and poetry.

(vi) The Linguistic difference that we find in the employment of courtly sanskrit for some persons and prakrit for women and men of inferior rank is a remarkable feature of the Sanskrit drama.

Such a distinction is altogether absent in Greek drama. It is possibly due to the fact that when dramas came to be written in Sanskrit it was no longer the "talking language of the people." By the third century before Christ, Sanskrit ceased to be a popular language and in the dramas of Bhasha and Kalidasa while the learned and principal personages speak in sanskrit, female and inferior characters use varieties of the Prakrit while Karpurmontari (the only example of Sattaka or minor heroic comedy) was written entirely in Prakrit. The dramatic genius of the Hindu reached its perfection betweeen the second century B. C. and the ninth century A. D. Various dramas rich in poetry, and perfect in execution have been traced to this period. Bhasha, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Shudraka, Shri Harsha all belong to this august period of the Sanskrit drama, their very structures differ from that of the Greek drama.

drama, the CHORUS, is conspicuously absent from the Sanskrit drama. Again Sutradhara, Nati, Nandi, Amukha etc. are not to be found in a Greek play.

Almost invariably in all Sanskrit plays we come across a comic character (or Vidushaka) who is a boon companion of the hero of the drama and pleases him by his witticisms and observations on some dramatic situations. This comic character is said to have influenced even European dramatists in their representations of fools and jesters. Pischel in his "Home of puppet plays" says, "Vidushaka is the original of the buffoon who appears in the plays of Mediaeval Europe." This was however absent in the dramas of Eschylees, Euripides and Sophocles.

A historical account of Sanskrit drama, though it may not pretend to any literary citicism, is apt to bring Kalidasa's name to the forefront. Kalidasa, an imperishable name in the world's literature, is yet chiefly known to the foreigners by his immortal drama—"Shakuntala." This famous comedy is in seven acts, its plot being taken from the 1st book of the Mahabharata. It is a dramatic romance of the surpassing beauty and surely one of the master-pieces in world's literature. Kalidas has been justly called the Shakespeare of India and his wonderful knowledge of human nature in all its varied and profound phases is quite Shakespearean. His imagination was not only a realising faculty, but it could easily grasp the past, the present, and the future. He was a profound artist as well. The activity and universality of his genius pervaded every subject he touched, and clothed it in the most attractive garb and everything in his hands became instinct with new life and redolent with poetical beauty

Kalidasa is unquestionably the greatest of the sanskrit poets, and may be emphatically described as the genius of ancient India. He was, according to popular tradition the most brilliant of the nine gems who adorned the court of Vikramaditya, the most puissant monarch of his age, who drove away the Scythians and other barbarous races beyond the Indus, and whose dominion extended over the whole of *southern India*. Of the early history and antecedents of Kalidasa, little or nothing is known. According to legendary account he was destitute of all education and even of common sense so much so that he was found, on one occasion cutting down the very branch of a tree on which he was seated! He was afterwards blessed and inspired by Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning and he then wrote under her inspiration the three dramas of fame Vikramorvashi, Shakuntala and Malavikagni-Mitra, all of them remarkable for their elegance, poetry and delicacy of subtle dramatic art. They all exhibit a deep acquaintance with the mechanism of the human heart, as well with nature. They are full of interesting incidents that move forward with a spontaneous ease and there the characters act and speak just as they might do in real life.

The Hindu dramatists, as observed by a reputed writer in the Cornhill Magazine, have the highest name among all the authors whose human personality is acknowledged by Hindu piety. The chief poets of the great literary age of India, like those of the similar period in France, were unquestionably dramatists, and judged either by the quantity or by the quality of their works, they shed a lustre on their era, which has not been eclipsed by subsequent poets.

The plot of the Shakuntala the translation of which by Sir William Jones in 1789 first revealed to the cultural peoples of the West the existence and superiority of an Indian Drama, can be recounted in brief. King Dushyanta appears in the court, and orders his pradhan (or minister) to make preparations for a hunting excursion. The Raja sitting in his carriage pursues a stag, the stag disappears, upon which Dushyanta questions his charioteer about the flight of the stag. Having ascertained the fact from the latter, he hastens in another direction ; and discovering the stag, strikes it with an arrow. The poor creature runs for its life and takes shelter in the hermitage of Vaikhanasa Rishi who remonstrates with Dushyanta for injuring the stag.

Dushyanta expresses his regret, and receives pardon and benediction of the Rishi. He then proceeds to the Ashrama of another Rishi, named Kanva, the foster-father of Shakuntala. He there observes Shakuntala engaged with her companions in watering the trees. He conceals himself behind a tree, and hears her praising the beauty of the kāshara tree. Charmed with her discourse Dushyanta tries to find out her descent. Shakuntala is very much teased by a bhramara (black-bee) hovering about her face. The Raja, then, comes forward and asks the cause of her agitation and distress. After a mutual exchange of civilities, they all take their seats beneath an umbrageous tree. Dushyanta informs her of his country and descent. They then all retire to the Ashrama. The Raja is suddenly smitten with the charms of the lovely Shakuntala, who reciprocates his love, but is prevented by her innate modesty and delicacy from giving expression to her feelings Her e is, at last, conquered

by the persuasions of the King, and they are married at the end. Then Dushyanta returns to his capital anc completely forgets everything about the marriage. This oblivion or loss of memory about the marriage is the result of a curse pronounced on Shakuntala by the famous sage Durvasa Muni. The interest of the play is deeply concentrated in the fourth Act, which describes the departure of Shakuntala from the Ashrama of Kanv to her husband's place. Some time after Dushyanta's desertion of Shakuntala, Kanva discovers an auspicious omen which leads him to infer that Dushyanta will soor recover his memory about his marriage. On the eve c. her departure, Shakuntala thus laments her separation from her beloved trees and pet animals :—

SHAKUNTALA.

"My beloved jasmine, most brilliant of climbing plants, how sweet it is to see thee cling thus fondly to thy husband, the mango tree ; yet, prithee, turn thy twining arms for a moment in this direction to embrace thy sister ; she is going far away, and may never see thee again."

PRIYAMVADA.

You are not the only one, dearest, to feel the bitterness of parting. As the time of separation approaches, the whole grove seems to share your anguish.

In sorrow for thy loss the herd of deer
Forget to browse; the peacock on the lawn
Ceases its dance ; the very trees around us
Shed their pale leaves, like tears, upon the ground.

KANVA.

Daughter! the cherished purpose of my heart
Has ever been to wed thee to a spouse
That should be worthy of thee; such a spouse
Hast thou thyself, by thine own merits, won.
To him thou goest, and about his neck
Thy favourite jasmine twines its loving arms
Around the sturdy mango. Leave thou it
To its protector... e'en as I consign
Thee to thy Lord, and henceforth from my m
Banish all anxious thought on thy behalf.

isten, then, my daughter. When thou reachest nd's place, and art admitted into his family

Honour thy betters; ever be respectful
To those above thee; and should others share
Thy husband's love, ne'er yield thyself a prey
To jealousy; but ever be a friend,—
A loving friend, to those who rival thee
In his affections. Should thy wedded Lord
Treat thee with harshness, thou must never be
Harsh in return, but patient and submissive.
Be to thy menials courteous, and to all
Placed under thee, considerate and kind;
Be never self-indulgent, but avoid
Excess in pleasure; and when fortune smiles,
Be not puffed up. Thus to thy husband's hou
Wilt thou a blessing prove, and not a curse.

1 the arrival of Shakuntala at the palace of 1 id she is repudiated by him. Dushyanta forg arriage owing to the mysterious disppearance of ' ge-ring, and refused to acknowledge Sakunt

as his wife when she came to the palace with two disciples of Kanva—Sarngarava and Saradvata and the old maid Gautami. Shakuntala was then taken to the celestial region by her mother. There she was delivered of a child—"Sarvadamanas" who was subsequently known as Bharata भरत* from whom India came to be known as Bharatavarsha भारतवर्ष—.Dushyanta, at last remembered Shakuntala by the sight of the ring given to her by the King presented to him by a fisherman which he found within a fish. After many vicissitudes when Dushyanta went to Indra for helping the latter, the two lovers were united by the grace of gods.

To comment upon the merits of Shakuntala would be as useless as to gild refined gold—So we must refrain from all such vain attempts; here we quote only a few lines from Schlegel.—

"And to go to the other extreme, among the Indian people from whom perhaps all the cultivation of the human race has been derived, plays were known long before they could have experienced any foreign influence. It has lately been made known to Europe, that they have a rich dramatic literature, which ascends back *for more than two thousand years.* The only specimen of their plays (nataks) hitherto known to us is the delightful Sakoontola which, notwithstanding the colouring of a foreign climate, bears in its general structure such a striking resemblance to our romantic drama, that we might be inclined to suspect that we owe this resemblance to the predilection for Shākespeare entertained by Jones, the English translator, if his fidelity were

* This is a different person from the author of Natyashastra.



not confirmed by other learned orientalists. In the golden times of India, the representation of this Natak served to delight the splendid imperial court of Delhi; but it would appear that, from the misery of numberless oppressions, the dramatic art in the courtry is now entirely at an end".

Monier Williams, author of an English translation of Shakuntala, says, "The English reader remembering that the author of the Shakuntala lived in the century preceding the Christian era, will at least be inclined to wonder at the analogies which it offers to our own dramatic composition of fifteen or sixteen centuries later. The dexterity with which the plots arranged and conducted, the ingenuity with which the incidents are connected, the skill with which the characters are delineated and contrasted with each other, the boldness and felicity of the diction, would scarcely be unnorthy of the great dramatists of modern time." Who does not remember Goethe's unrestrained eulogy over the merits of the drama of Shakuntala :—

वासन्तं कुसुमं, फलं च युगपद् ग्रीष्मस्य सर्व्वं च यद्
यत् किञ्चिन्मनसो रसायनमथो सन्तर्पणं मोहनम् ।
एकीभूतमभूतपूर्व्वमथवा स्वर्लोक भूलोकयो-
रैश्वर्य्यं यदि कोऽपि काङ्क्षति तदा शाकुन्तलं सेव्यताम् ॥

"Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms
and the fruits of its decline
And all by which the soul is charmed,
enraptured, feasted, fed?
Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself
in one sole name combine?
I name, thee, O "Shakuntala · and all at once is said."

Goethe also wrote most eulogistically in a letter, to Mr. Chazy the French Scholar, in Sanskrit, on reading a copy of the same drama edited by the latter.*

Besides other well-known poetic compositions as the Raghuvamsha, and the Meghaduta of which we have nothing to do here, Kalidasa wrote two other excellent dramas—Malavikagnimitra and Vikramorvashi. The former deals with the love of king Agnimitra as how the hero falls in love with Malavika, a maid of honour to his queen, which naturally leads to many love-intrigues in the harem but ultimately ends in union between the two lovers. The latter is a glorious melodrama and deals with mythical story about the love of Maharja Pururavas (King of Pratisthana and the nymph Urvashi who was driven out of the heavens for uttering in the guise of Lakshmi the name of Pururavas instead of Vishnu, but was ultimatedly allowed to live with her lover till the birth of the child. This piece was translated by Dr. H. H. Wilson in 1827 and contains an Act of incomparable loveliness. Kalidasa is historically timed sometime between the first century before Chirst, as his hero Agnimitra was the son of General Pushyamitra who exterminated the Maurya Dynasty in the middle of second century B. C.) and the sixth century as he himself is named by Bana Bhatta and the author of Aihole Prashasti who flourished in the beginning of the 7th century. He is popularly known to belong as the chief of the nine gems (lit. Navaratna) to the court of Vikramaditya, king of Ujjayin who routed the Sakas when Samvat commenced and is known as 'Shakari.' Though Kalidasa's dramas are

* This letter is to be found in *Hiexel's* introduction to his German Translation of Shakuntala

comedies, he is often compared and contrasted with Shakespeare and some such comparative reviews about him may be found in "Bangadarshan" of 1280 B. S. edited by the versatile master of the Bengali language, the late renowned Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

We may note here some points of difference between the two great poets of world-wide reputation. Kalidas's greatness lay more in the developement of individual characters whereas Shakespeare excelled in his masterly creation of types of men. The times and surroundings in which each was born greatly influenced his particular drama. Even creation of "fools" in each differed from the other. The Vidushoka was a Confidante of the hero in his love-affairs, whereas the jester was masterly in expressing truth under a humourous expression. But the human sentiments were wonderfully delineated both by Shakespeare and Kalidasha—of immortal fame.

CHAPTER IV

"DISCOVERY OF BHASA'S DRAMAS.

Next in importance, though not in point of time, may be mentioned the well-known dramas of Bhāsa.

Kalidasa was preceded by the remarkable dramatist Bhasa whose works had hitherto been unknown. It was only in the year 1912 appeared, the first of the series under the editorship of Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Ganapati Shastri, who by his most laborious and erudite research had succeeded in unearthing the invaluable dramas of Bhasa in the southern part of the Travancore State. As the Superintendent in charge of the publication of ancient Sanskrit works, he used to visit many places in connection with his work; and in 1910 found to his great astonishment, ten manuscript dramas hitherto unknown and written on palm leaves, in Malayalam characters in the Manalikkara Matham near Padmanābhapuram. The names of the dramas which are so many rare treasures are as follows :—

1. Svapnavasavadatta, 2. Pratinjna-Jaugandharayana 3. Pancharatra, 4. Charudatta, 5. Dutta-ghatotkacha, 6. Avimaraka, 7. Balacharitra, 8. Madhyamavyaoga, 9. Karnabhara, 10. Urubhanga.

Subsequently three more dramas Abhisheka-nataka, Pratima-nataka and Dutavakya were found for him by the astrologer Govinda Pisharodi at Kalidasapuram.

After the above remarkable dramas were traced out, G. Shastri approached the different Feudatory Chiefs, and the princes of Vijayanagara, Mysore and Travancore supplied him with the funds for printing and publication of the works of Bhasa. Pandit Ganapati Shastri is thus alone entitled to the credit of presenting to us the invaluable dramas of the great poet so long buried in oblivion.

PRIOR TO KALIDASA

That these dramas are prior to those of Kalidasa may be proved from the following references :—

1. In the prologue to Malavikagnimitra, Kalidasa asks the question "why so much honour to the present poet (वर्तमानकवे:) passing by the dramas of such famous poets Bhasa, Soumilla and Kaviputra.
2. In the 7th century, poet Banabhatta praises Bhasha as an eminent dramatist—"सपताकैर्यशो लेभे भासो देवकुलैरिव" ।
3. Vakpati the poet of the "Prakrita Ganda" mentions Bhasa as among his favourite poets and
4. Rajashekara about 900 A. D. speaks of Bhasa's Svapnavasavadatta, as an excellent drama that could not be burnt by the fire of criticism.

BHASA'S TIME

From the above and various other sources Pandit Kashiprasad ascertains that Bhasa flourished in the first entury B. C. being the court Pandit of King Narayana of he Kanva Dyansty Pandit Ganpat Shastri however laces him before (i. e. 4th century B C.)

As there is no reason to discard that view, we feel tempted to accept the opinion of this competent scholar, and place Bhasa in the period 4th century B. C. Doctors Keith and Winternitiz, however, place him about a century or two earlier than Kalidasa (i.e. 4th or 3rd century A. D.). Their main arguments are that in language and style, Bhasa's dramas are nearer to Kalidasa than to Ashvaghosha, the author of the poem Buddhacharita and the drama Sariputra-Prakarana ; and as the latter probably belongs to the first or the second century A. D. and as Kalidasa probably lived in the 5th century, Bhasa must have flourished in the end of the 3rd century or in the beginning of the 4th century A. D. The embarrassing question of Asvaghosha's priority to Bhasa on the evidence of Prakrit is an open one still. We shall not waste any pen and tax our readers' patience by holding to any of these theories in preference to others. We do not fix the time, but it was prior to Kalidasa, and it was sometime between 4th century B. C. and fourth century A. D.

SOURCES

Bhasa's dramas had the two epics as their sources, especially the Mahabharata. The Ramayana forms the subject matter of only two dramas-Abhishekanataka and Pratima nataka. Madhyamavyayoga, Dutavakhya, Dutaghatotkacha Karnabhara, and Vrubhanga—these five plays have each but one act. Pancharatra has three acts. Pratijnajaugandharayana and Charudatta have four acts each. Balacharita has five acts. Svapna-Vasawadatta and Avimaraka have six acts each, Abhisheka and Pratima have seven acts each.

The discovery of these dramas proves to what a high

pitch of perfection, the Hindu stage reached at that time. And one could not but agree with Dr. Winternitz when he says that Kalidasa may be a greater poet and a greater master of language, but no drama of his or any of the later poets could be compared as a stage-play with any of the thirteen plays ascribed to Bhasa. Indeed these dramas are the works of a genius who was thoroughly conversant with the technique of the stage and who, it is apparent, knew what actual stage-representation is.

Besides, Ashvaghosha, who wrote Sariputra Prakarana and other two dramas, fragments of which have since been discovered. probably in the first century A. D., we have another dramatist of rare merit, Shudraka, the author of Mirichhakatika (lit. a cart of clay i. e. a toy cart) an admirable drama which sketches some pictures of society which are still to be found. The play itself presents king Shudraka as its author and gives curious details of his capacities. Shudraka is generally regarded as a merely legendary person, though Prof. Sten Konow treats him as historical. He is the Ābhira Prince Shivadatta who or whose son Ishvarasena overthrew the last of the Andhra dynasty and founded the Chedi era of A. D. 248-9. Some, again, try to father the authorship of the work on Dandin. But the arguments are not very covincing.

The Toy-Cart is a drama describing the love of Charudatta a young Brahmana merchant and the hataera Vasantasena, which also forms the subject matter of Bhasa's Charudatta. Some critics are of opinion that both have been the works of the same author, but there is much difference. The Toy-cart is interwoven with a political intrigue absent in the other work Aryaka, the

son of a herds-man, who drove the Kshatriya king Palaka in the Toy-clay-cart does not find any place or mention in Bhasa's Charudatta.

From the expression of the child of Charudatta who said he possesses a toy-cart, the drama has been so named.

If Bhasa appeared in first century A. D. or earlier than that, between Bhasa and Kalidasa we have only few dramas. Could these several hundred years be absolutely barren without any drama ? India then lacked neither in brain nor in prosperity. It was the palmy days of her intellectual greatness. Was it unfavourable only to drama ? Certainly not. With time India has lost many things, but no loss is so sad and heavy as the loss of books. It was her priceless treasure. Devastations carried on both by time and by foreign sword have spared only a few of those invaluable game. It is really painful to find that books that were once quite popular and many of which have been approvingly quoted or referred to in subsequent or contemporary works exist only in names. In every branch of knowledge and art this sad loss is seriously felt and dramatic literature is no exception to this, and good many plays that were once famous exist only in names being mentioned in other works; and it appears there were many dramas like those of Bhasa which have been buried in oblivion and other Ganapatis are necessary for their discovery.

From Kalidasa we come to ShriHarsha, of the 7th century A. D. well-known for the works—Ratnavoli, Nagananda and Priyadarshika. The question of their actual authorship was raised long ago. Mammata Bhatta

in his Kavyaprakasha merely refers to the gift of gold to Bana (or Dhavaka in some mss.) by Harsha. The commentators explain this of the Ratnavali which was passed off in Harsha's name. This is not in any way borne out by other early traditions. I-Tsing clearly refers to the dramatization of Nagananda by Harsha and Damodaragupta in his Kuttamimata (end of the 8th century A. D.) ascribes the authorship of Ratnavali to a king.

We now proceed to mention some of the worthies whose dramas are conspicuous even to-day.

Bhavabhuti (8th century A. D.), an imperishable name in Sanskrit, and hardly deemed inferior to anybody in dramatic genius, wrote the following dramas :

1. Malatimadhava : Malati was the daughter of a minister and Madhava a young scholar. They fell in love. The king was resolved to marry Malati to one of his favourites Nandana whom she detested. The lovers were finally united by the endeavours of Makaranda, a friend of Madhava. The drama is Indian Romeo Juliet with a happy ending. It gives a very life-like picture of society and contemporary manners. Erotic sentiment (or Shringara Rasha) is described with truest touches of tenderness and pathos and a purity of sentiment underlies it.

Malatimadhava is a fine specimen of Hindu dramatic literature. Although Shringara Rasa, or the erotic sentiment constitutes the predominating element of the play, yet in respect to fastidious delicacy, it may be advantageously compared, as observed by Professor Horace Hayman Wilson, with many of the dramas of

modern Europe treating of the same passion. Fervour of passion, the restraint and reserve with which it is avowed, and the purity of sentiment underlying it, constitute a most pleasant interesting picture of Hindu national life. The play is full of incidents, showing that the course of true love never runs smooth, but the denouement results as usual in the marriage of the lovers. The play thus concludes with the address of Kamandaki, priestess of Buddha and nurse of Malati, to Madhava, and the reply of the latter.

"Kam—

My son, what more remains ?
The happiness that was your earliest hope,
By my devotion and the skilful pains
Of my disciples, is at last ensured you.
The King and Nandana approve the suit
Of your dear friend, and hence no fear prevents
His union with his love. If yet there be
A wish ungratified, declare it........ speak.

"Madhava (Bowing)—

My hapiness hence forth is perfect ; all
The wish I cherish more is this, and may
Your favour, holy dame, grant it fruition.
Still may the virtuous be exempt from error.
And fast to virtue cling ; may monarchs merciful,
And firm in equity, protect the earth
May in due season from the labouring clouds
The fertile showers descend ; and may the people,
Blest in their friends, their kindred and their children,
Unknowing want, live cheerful and content."

In Mahaviracharita, the poet narrates the story of Rama from his boyhood upto his conquest of Lanka and then his return to Ayodhya. The course of the Godavari in the poet's native land has been beautifully described.

Uttararamacharita deals with the picture of Sita in exile and ends with her restoration after 12 years of extreme misery and suffering. It is a magnificent poem and its pathos can hardly be equalled with that found in any drama of its kind. Bhavabhuti was a more impassioned writer than Kalidasa. It is said that "His are words that breathe and thoughts that burn." The description of the scenes in Vindhya hills is marvellous and in pathos and in tenderness Uttararamacharita has surpassed any description. It is said Bhavabhuti at the request of the actors composed this drama to be played during the Yatra-mahatsava ceremony of Kalapriyanatha (identified with Lord Mahakala of Ujjayini). Prof. Wilson finds a reflection of Lava and Kusha, the twin sons of Sita, in the stay and education of princes Gedarius and Arbebegus in the monastery of Bellarius in Cymbeline.

Vishakhadatta (probably 8th century A. D.) in Mudrarakshasa describes the full court-intrigues in Chandragupta's time. Rakshasa was the minister of the last Maurya King. The plot turns on the gaining over of this Prime Minister of the ancient regime. Next may be mentioned the name of Murari (Circa 9th century A. D.) author of Anargha-raghava and Rajashekhara (900 A. D.)—the author of Balaramayana, Balabharata, V[illegible] bhanjika and Karp[illegible] jari (entirely in P[illegible])

Kshemishvara (10th century A. D.) wrote Chandakaushika and Naishadhananda. Krishna mishra (latter half of the 11th Century A. D.) wrote the allegorical drama Prabodha Chandrodaya. It is a glorification of the cult of Vishnu and he had many followers in this new type of departure from the steriotyped path.

Though it cannot be definitely ascertained if there was any scenery, as understood in the modern sense, but thrones, weapons and carriages and rathas (chariots) with live cattle were used. We also believe that there were contrivances to represent the ingress and egress of carriages as in the case of Mrichchhakatika and Vikramorvashi and latterly of Rukminiharana. One of the most noticeable features in connection with the ancient drama, was not only the introduction in society of ladies of rank and title but the representation of female parts by females ; these always appeared in appropriate costumes.

We have already mentioned the famous dramas in Sanskrit and following is the list of other Hindu dramas composed at different periods beginning from the 7th century A. D.

Dramatist	Drama.
Mahendra Vikramavarman (Pallava king of Kanchi) ...	Mattavillasa (Prahasana)
Anangaharsha Matraraja ...	Tapasa vatsharajacharita.
Mayuraja ...	Udattaraghava.
Yoshovarman (king of Kanyakubja) ...	Ramabhyudaya.

[It would not be perhaps out of place to mention in this connexion, some other dramas, viz. Chhalitarama, Pandavananda, Tarangadatta Pushradushitaka (Pushpa- [illegible]

bhushita) etc. These are of uncertain authorship and date, being for the most part known through the quotations found in Dhanika and Vishvanatha.]

Dramatist		Drama
Bhimata	...	Svapnadashanana
Jayadeva	...	Prasannaraghava.
Ramabhadra Dikshita	.	Janaki-parinaya.
Mahadeva	.	Abdhutadarpana.
Ravivarman	...	Pradyumnabhyudaya.
Shesha Krishna	...	Kamsavadha.
Ramavarman	...	Rukminiparinaya.
Samaraja Dikshita	...	Shridamacharita.
Kshemendra (of Kashmir)		Chitrabharata.
Kulashekharavarman (King of Kerala)	...	Subhadradhananjaya Tapati-samvarana.
Prahladanadeva	...	Parthaparakrama.
Visaladevavigraharaja (Chahamana king)	...	Harakelinataka (partionally preserved on stone).
Vamana Bhatta Bana	.	Pravati parinaya (once wrongly ascribed to the great poet Bana).
Jagajjyotirmalla (of Nepal)		Hara-gauri-vivaha.
Manika (Napalese poet)	..	Bhairavananda.
Harihara	...	Bhatriharinirveda.
Samadeva	..	Lalitavigraharajanataka (preserved in part in an inscription, being composed in honour of Visaladeva Vigraharaja the chahamana.

Dramatist	Drama
Vidyanatha	... Protaparudrakalyana.
Jayasimha Suri	... Hammiramadamardana.
Gangadhara	... Gangadasa pratapa vilasa.
Venkatanatha	... Sankalpasuryodaya.
Bilhana	... Kamasundari (Natika).
Madana Balasarasvati	... Vijayashri or Parijata manjari (two acts of which are preserved on stone).
Mathuradasa	Vrishabhaniya (Natika).
Narasingha	... Shiva - narayanabhanjamahodaya (Natika).
Ghanashyama	... Anandasundari (Sattaka)
Vishveshvara	... Shringaramanjari (Do.)
Uddandin	... Malikamaruta (Prakarana) (once ascribed to Dandin)
Ramachandra (Jaina)	... Kaumudimitrananda (Prakarana)
Ramabhadra Muni (Jaina)	Probudha Rauvhineya (Do)
Yashashchandra	.. Mudritakumudachandra (Prakarana)
Shankhadhara Kabiraja	... Latakamelaka (Prahasana)
Jyotirishvara Kavishekhara	Dhurta Samagama
Jagadishvara	... Hasyarnava
Samaraja Dikshita	... Dhurtanartaka
Chaplain of Lakshmana Manikyadeva of Bhuluya	Kautukaratnakara
Vamana Bhatta Bana	.. Shringarabhushana (Bhana)
Rambhadra Dikshita	... Shringartilaka or Ayyabhana.
Varadaraja (Ammal Acharya)	... Vasantatilaka or Ammabhana



Dramatist	Drama
Kashipati Kaviraja	... Mukundananda (mixed Bhana)
Shankara	... Sharadatilaka (Bhana)
Nalla Kavi	. Shringarasarvasva (Bhana)
A Yuvaraja from Kotilinga in Kerala	... Rasasadana (Bhana)

MINOR DRAMATIC TYPES.

Vatsaraja (a minister of Paramardideva of Kalinjara)	1. Kiratarjuniya (Vyayoga) 2. Karpuracharita (Bhana) 3. Hasyachudamani (Prahasana) 4. Rukminiharana (Ihamriga) 5. Tripuradaba (Dima) 6. Samudramanthana (Samavakara)
Vishvanatha	.. Saugandhikaharana (Vyayoga)
Kanchana Pandita	... Dhananjayavijaya (Do)
Mokshaditya	... Bhimavikramavyayoga (Do)
Ramachandra	... Nirbhayabhima (Vyayoga)
Krishna Mishra	... Viravijaya (Ihamriga)
Krishna Avadhuta Ghatikashata Mahakavi	... Sarvavinodanataka (Ihamriga)
Venkatavarada	.. Krishnavijaya (Dima)
Rama	... Manmathonmathana
Bhashkara Kavi	... Unmattaraghava (Anka)
Lokanatha Bhatta	... Krishnabhyudaya (Anka or Prekshanaka)
Krishna Kavi	... Sharmishtha-Yayati (Do)
Rupa Gosvamih	. Danakeli-Kaumudi (Bhanika)

Dramatist	Drama
Mahadeva	... Shubhadraharana (Shrigadita)
Meghaprobhacharya	... Dharmabhyudaya (Shadow-play)
Subhata	.. Dutangada (Chhayanataka)
Vyasa Shri Ramadeva	.. Subhadra-parinaya, Ramabhyudaya and Pandavabhyudaya.
Shankaralala	... Savitricharrita
Madhusudhana	... Mahanataka
Ramakrishna	... Gopalkelichandrika.

We shall besides these seperately deal with some renowned dramatists of Bengal whose Sanskrit Natakas were more of a devotional nature.

BENGALI DRAMATIST

We ought to mention here about a drama, preserved in stone slabs, from the pen of a Bengali dramatist. The drama composed for a prince of Gujrat, affords some evidence of the genius of Bengali scholars who greatly contributed to the development of the Hindu Drama. Even centuries after we have heard of the existence of a Sanskrit Drama by a Bengalee about the year 1757, A. D. when the English had their Play-House at Lalbazar, under the caption "Rov-Bijoya Nataka" at Rajnagore (Vikramnagur)

Madana, a Bengali Brahmin and a descendant of Gangadhara of the Bondopadhaya stock wrote an excellent drama —"Parijat Manjuri Natika" said to have been composed

* The drama is in Sanskrit and will, we hope, be published from the Dacca University.

(रचित Rachita) in 1211 or 1213 A. D. It has recently been discovered and has thus by the most direct and authentic evidence raised the cultural position of Bengal that existed in the Thirteenth century. He was the Rajguru i. e, Upadhaya (or preceptor) of Arjuna Verma King of Dhara, the ancient capital of the Parmara Kings of Malava and the present chief town of a state in Central India. Madan was also known as Bāla Saraswati. He produced other poetical works and helped the Raja in the compilation of the commentary on the "Amarusataka". अमरुशतक । The actual drama has not been discovered, but an inscription consisting of 82 lines in old Nagri (Sanskrit) character consisting of a pane gyric on Arjuna has been found out It is recorded there that the Parijat Manjuri Natika was composed by Madan, a Bengali Brahman descendant from Gangadhara—"Gauria Gangapuline". Engraved on a slab of black stone 8 feet by 5 feet, the drama was then discovered in 1903 at Bhojashala (Kamal Moula Mosque). On receiving the information Prof. F. Hulczsch Ph. D. went to the place and arranged to secure mechanical copies of the inscription which consisting of 82 lines gives us the nucleus of an unfinished drama in the district of Malava

The languages of the inscription read sanskrit and Prakrit as are seen in the works of Bhasa and Kalidasa, there being 73 verses and the rest in prose. The last verse (76th) runs thus :—

"This panegyric (Prasasti) was engraved by the artist Silpi Ramadeva, the son of the excellent sculptor (Rupakara) Sihika (Rupkara Ramadevena silpina).

The inscription contains the first two acts of a hitherto unknown Natika i.e. a drama in four acts entitled

"Parijat Monjuri" or "Vijayasri." The inscription is now well preserved in the mosque.

Arjun Varma descendant of Sārvabhauma Bhojadeva is the hero of the drama. He obtained the title of Tribidha Churamani and defeated Joysimha the Gurjara King on the borders of the land at the foot of a mountain called "Parba Parbbat." The poet represents Arjuna as an equal of his ancestor Bhojadeva and even as an incarnation of Bhoja. In verse 2, Bhojadeva himself is compared to the God Krishna and to the epic hero Arjuna.

According to the prologue, the first performance of the drama took place in a temple of the goddess Saraswati during 'Vasantotshoba' (Spring festival). The sce of the first act is the top of the royal palace and that of the second act a pleasure garden (Promod-uddan) on the Dhāra giri (Dhāragiri), a hill near the city.

The dramatist persons are:—the stage manager (Sutradhar) the actress (Nati) the King Arjuna Verma, the Jestor Bidagha, the Queen Sarvakali, her maid Kanakalekha, the royal gardener (Kusumkara), his wife Basantalila and the heroine Parijata Manjuri or Vijoysri. The king and the Kusumkara speak Sanskrit and the remaining persons prakrit,—Sauraseni in the prose passages and Maharastri in the verses. The pretty verses of the bards which are recited behind the stage are also in Prakrit,

In the Prologue, the Sutradhara says to the Nati (actress) that when the army of Joysimha took to flight and the victorious Arjuna Verma was still seated on his ... a cluster of blossoms of a celestial tree

Parijata fell on his breast and on touching it, was transformed into a beautiful maiden while a voice from heaven spoke thus:—

"Enjoying this lovely auspicious Vijoysri, thou a Lord of Dharma, shall become equal to Bhojadeva."

Joysri was the daughter of the Chalukya king Joysimha and was the goddess of victory. She left her father and transformed herself into the blossoms of the celestial tree Parijata. Arjuna placed her under the care of Kusumkara, the Chamberlain.

The first act bears the title "The spring festival (Vasanta-utshaba). It describes the king viewing his sporting subjects from the top of his palace in the company of the jestor, the queen and her maid.

The title of the second act is the reflecting ear-ring (Taranka Darpana). The king accompanied by the jestor repairs to the pleasure garden to witness a ceremony performed by the queen—the marriage of a mangoe to a spring creeper. Vasanta Lila and the heroine watch the proceedings from behind a tree. Bending aside the branches, the former reveals to the King the image of his beloved reflected in the queen's ear-ring. The king's delight and the confusion arouse the suspicions of the queen who leaves abruptly together with her maid. The heroine and Vasantalila also withdraw. At the advice of the jestor who reminds the King of the proverb that "Friend, killed and eaten comes to the same," वयस्य मारिदस्य भूजितस्य य एक जेव नामां (१—५९) both follow them to the emerald pavillion. The King's talks are interrupted by the ...earance of Kanakalekha who is the bearer of the ear-jewel and of an ironical from the queen.

The King tries in vain to hide Parijat Monjuri behind his back. At the end, he leaves her in order to pacify the jealous queen. The heroine also departs threatening to commit suicide and Vasantalila follows her. *

From the list, given in pages 70-74 which is by no means exhaustive, it is abundantly clear that dramatic institutionwas established in India from a very long time and rightly observes Dr. Horace, H. Wilson, "Hindu dramas are unmixedly their own." In fact, Indian drama was of more ancient origin than the Greek drama. The nations of Europe possessed no dramatic literature before the fourteenth or fifteenth century at which period the Hindu drama passed into its decline. And thus writes Stanley Rice in his "Indian Art and Letters" (Vol. 1 No. 2).

"It is indeed significant that in all these discussions (influence of the Greeks upon Sanskrit drama) it is always assumed that the influence to be traced out must have originated in the West and have operated in the East. This is probably due to the classical obsession of Europeans, for, as a matter of fact, in the things of the mind, at any rate until very recently it is always the East that had re-acted upon the West, and the most notable example is, of course, Christianity itself." Our remarks will further be clear if we look into the origin of the Greek Drama. Of course any detailed account is quite out of our sphere.

---

* (For the above article we are grateful to Professor E, Hultsch Ph. D. Halle, Government Epigraphist on his erudite article "Dhar Prasasti of Arjuna Verma." Vide Epigraphica Indica Vol. VIII page 96)

* Vide also Indian Antiquary Vol XXXV Aug. 1906—for Sten Konow's review of the above article published in the form of a book by Dr. Hulzsch.

CHAPTER V.

GREEK DRAMA.

In the opinion of Aristotle whose poetics contain the essential elements of the dramatic form, drama rose out of the worship of Bacchus and those, who sang hymns in honour of Bacchus or the God of wine, were the first dramatists or actors. 600 or 700 years before the birth of Christ, this God with great festivities was worshipped in Greece and priests of each community composed hymns or songs in praise of that God. They were recited and sung with great zest. The hymns in honour of Bacchus, while they described his rapid progress and splendid conquests, became imitative, and in the contests of the Pythian games, the players on the flute who entered into competitions were enjoined by an express law to represent successively the circumstances that had preceded, accompanied and followed the victory of Apollo over Python.

This is in fact the beginning of the Greek drama something like Indra's victory over the Asuras that was honoured by a dramatic show.

Like our Ramayana and Mahabharata, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey supplied a number of dramatic themes, and for this Aristotle called Homer as the Originator of the dramatic art as Valmiki now is called. But in truth Thespis was the founder of the Western

dramatic institution, and so dramatic art is known as Thespian art*, as also actors are known as the sons of Thespis, as our Bharatputras are. Dramas that were acted in honour of the gods were known as mystic plays, and from that and the subsequent mystery or miracle plays the English drama came into existence During the festivities along with the music sung in honour of the gods, goats were sacrificed. These songs were known as Tragoidia or the Song of the tragoi† or goat-chorus and from this the Great Word "Tragedy" has been derived.

In 580 B. C. Susarion is said to have exposed the faults of the Greek character on the stage, and Greek (Attic) Comedies are supposed to date from that time.

Shortly after this Thespis who treated more noble subjects based upon history, for the first time composed Alcestis, the first Greek tragedy and it was acted in 536 B. C.‡

In the year 534 B. C. Thespis first introduced a a person for doing the talking business in the course of songs and hymns sung in honour of Bacchus and other gods. Thus 'actor' first comes in the West. Later on, in 512 B. C. Thespis introduced Phrynichos as the sole master of the stage.

In 499 B. C. Phrynichos won the tragic prize, and thereafter contributed to the stage seventy plays of which

* Our Bengali readers might remember about the Thespian Temple opened in the year 1315 on the stage of "Royal Bengal" through the efforts of Babu Kshetromohan Mitter, a distinguished actor of that period with the performance of "Nurmahal".

† Satyros or Tragos was a type of nature-spirit. These fairies are figured as clad in and with goats tails and legs

seven only are extant. Then Aischylos (525-456 B.C.) the famous Greek dramatist, first curtailed abundance of songs, introduced suitable dresses and more dialogues and conversations in the mouth of actors, and Sophokles (495-406 B. C.) afterwards increased their number into three, and sometimes into four. Aischylos, too, then increased the number (in imitation of Sophokles). Euripides introduced philosophy and other grave topics in his dramas. In 438 B. C. Euripides brought out, in lieu of a satyr play, his Alkestis. Phrynichos, the great master of generation before Aischylos, also wrote an Alkestis of this romantic description. Euripides's Alkestic was a distinct departure from the path of contemporary satyr play and marks an interesting development of tragedy after Thespis and Aischylos.

The wise Solon alarmed by the dramatic innovations made by Thespis said to him "If we applaud falsehood in our public exhibitions, we shall soon find that it will insinuate itself into our most sacred engagements."

Of course the wise legislator's fears were unfounded.

Epicharmos (c. 540 B. C.) and Aristophanes (c. 450 B. C.) employed a number of persons for the stage representations of their comedies.

Aristophanes exposed the follies and vices of the Greeks. It is said that he attacked an influential Greek Senator named Cloe in his Equities, but none dared to appear in that role. At last Aristophanes himself acted the part. The people were so much pleased with the acting that they compelled Cloe to pay a fine of five talents and showered flowers on the head of the dramatist.

Who has not heard of Aristophanes's "Clouds" wherein the dramatist gives us that deathless caricature of immortal Sokrates.*

Thespis, Aeschylos Sophokles, Aristopanes, and Euripides are the greatest names in the Greek drama.

When the Athenian army under the command of Nikias fell into the hands of victors at Sicily, they were treated there with very great harshness, but those who could repeat the verses of Euripides were released. Any more detailed notice of them is outside the scope of this treatise and to sum up, we have already noticed the difference between the Greek Drama and Sanskrit plays and have fully discussed that there is not the least vestige of doubt that Indian drama was purely of indigenous origin and growth. Their scope and nature are quite different. Equally strong may be the theory that Greek Art owed its origin to Indian Drama. The question then may arise where are the Indian dramas? Written on Palm-leaf manuscripts and not printed, they might have shared the same fate as the dramas of Bhasa. Unless they were abundant in existence, Ramayana, Mahabharata and other Puranas would not have made constant mention of the "drama"; the stage, the auditorium, origin and developement—all are referred to in Natyashastra. That the subsquent dramas are not borrowed from the Greeks is palpably clear from the very nature of the dramas, a the absence of the Unities, and other details (which we have discussed above) invariably pointing out to the conclusions we have already arrived at.

* Rasharaj [illegible] Bose was called by "Pioneer" the [illegible] es of Bengal.

CHAPTER VI

THE POSITION OF AN ACTOR.

The origin of the Indian Drama, as we have already seen was associated with the early religious festivities of the Hindus and in the begining, an Indian Drama was something like a mystery or a miracle play. Thus writes Prof. Eggeling in connection of Patanjali's commentary:—"Judging from these allusions, theatrical entertainments in those days seem to have been very much on a level with our own religious spectacles or mysteries though there may already have been some simpler kinds of secular plays which Patanjali had no occasion to mention."

But Indian drama soon reached a flourishing stage and secular plays began to be written. The discovery of Bhasa's plays and the existence of Mrichhakatika prove to demonstration that drama and dramatic represention attained great perfection in very ancient times. When Kalidasa wrote, the reputation of Bhasa and Saumilla was fully established in the country. Kalidasa speaks of Bhasa as of wide reputation, "Why should you prize", writes Kalidasa "the work of a new poet, Kalidasa, leaving aside the dramas of Bhasa, Saumilla and other poets of wide reputation ?"

Now it is abundantly clear that theatre is an ancient institution in India and it could not have attained so

much perfection and popularity unless there were efficient actors or persons skilled in histrionic arts from the very begining.

An actor in Sanskrit was called a Nata and references about him, as we have seen before, are to be found in the early treatises of the Hindus.

In India neither the thatre nor the actor was at any time under any social or political ban, and from various Sanskrit works, we can to some extent ascertain the status and position of an actor in ancient India. Dr. Keith has very ably summarised it and we could do no better than to agree with the summary given by him.

In ancient times an actor was called a Nata, Kushilaba or Shailusha. The chief actor was called Sutradhara (literally denoting an architect). He was also known as Natakagamani or the head of the troop of actors. He was the Dramatic Director, Stage Manager and the Producer : in a word, he coached others in the histrionic art and was at the head of the dramatic representation, the success and failure of which mainly depended on him. He was a versatile gentleman and was required by his calling to possess a number of qualifications as a necessary adjunct to his office. He was supposed to be learned in all the arts and sciences of his time and familiar with the manners, customs and habits of all countries, to possess mastery over all techniques. He must be a man of practical knowledge, and should possess some knowledge of mechanics even. Such high qualifications he was required to possess. He also introduced the play to the audience and sometimes appeared in some important part of the drama e.g. as Vatsaraja in the Ratnavali and Kamandaki

in the Malatimadhava. His wife often assisted him as Nati.

But the reputation of an actor, generally speaking was rather low in society, actresses often led immoral lives and sometimes even their husbands were parties to many scandalous affairs ; therefore Manu, the great Legislator, imposes only a small penalty in cases of adultery with actors' wives. But surely the position of an Indian actor was never so precarious or dishonourable as it was amongst the actors in the merry times of Queen Elizabeth. There was a nobler side of their profession and people always honoured them. Bharata Muni, the author of the Natya Shastras, though an actor, has always been honoured as a sage* as the great dramatist of Bengal—Babu Girish Chandra Ghose though an actor was revered for his talents and religious devotion.

Bana Bhatta (7th century A. D.) in his Harsha-Charita mentions an actor and an actress amongst his personal friends.

Bhatrihari alludes to friendship between actors and kings, and this is borne out by the legend of Vasumitra, son of Kalidasa's hero Agnimitra, who was slain in the midst of actors, by his enemy.

Bhavabhuti in the prefaces of his two dramas asserts his friendship with actors. In truth, those who could represent highly subtle dramatic characterers of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti on the stage, could not but possess an amount of culture and education that would entitle him to any decent gentleman's friendship.

* Vide—page 33 Supra.

DRAMAS IN STONES

Besides the existence of actual dramas, we have also the incomplete portions of two dramas-Vigraharaja Nataka and Harakeli Nataka—preserved in part in the inscriptions at the mosque *Araidinka Jhonpra* (आराइदिन्का झोंपरा) situated on the lower slope of the Taragarh hill at Ajmere the administrative head quarters of the Ajmere-Merwara Division, Rajputna. The first one bears no date and the latter corresponds to a date—the 22nd November 1163 A. D.

The first drama opens with a conversation between the king Vigraharaja and Sachiprabha, a confidante of his lady love, the daughter of king Vasantapala. Vigraharaja then marches against the king of Turukshas and both the forces measure their strength. Here the inscription ends.

The other inscription contains the portion of "Harakeli Nataka" describing how Arjuna was preparing a sacrifice and a fierce battle took place between him and Shiva and his attendant Muka in the roles of Kirata and afterwards Shiva's acknowledging the powers of Arjuna. Shiva and Gouri then reveal to Arjuna their real form and then present him with a mystical weapon.

This drama apparently is an imitation of Bharati's poem Kiratarjuniya.

Besides Parijat Monjari Nataka. Vigraharaja Nataka, and Harakali Nataka we have also the traditional account of Hanumana Nataka being engraved on slates.

Sanskrit dramas for the first time began to decline

* Vide the Indian Antiquary Vol. XX June 1891, page 201 Sanskrit plays partly preserved as inscriptions at Ajmere by Professor. F. Kielhorn C I. E.,

with the advent of the Mohomedan rule in India It was the dark age for the Hindus and a good many Hindu institutions began to decline and some disappeared from the land for good. It was in fact a clash between two schools of culture and in the long conflict that ensued between the two, many of the early institutions of the Hindus died quite unnoticed for want of proper encouragement or sufficient patronage; and dramatic institution is one of them. The Mohomedans were without any national theatre and it received no tangible support from them. Political subjection, on the other hand brought about a radical change in Indian life and the Hindus lost much of their early freedom, simplicity and ease, their life and property were insecure and their well-being depended upon the sweet will of their rulers. The Smritis came in with their elaborate systems. A good deal of artificial restraints were introduced into society. It pushed back Indian women, excluded them entirely from society and introduced the 'pardah' as a protection against all profane gaze. The Hindus in course of time grew stoic and joyless and became almost a lifeless people. They began to deprecate many innocent public festivities and the drama and art began to decline from that time, and had not Lord Chaitanya, the great saint and reformer of Bengal introduced some devotional plays, dramatic art would have been throughly extinct in the land.

The only thing that survived in upper India by way of dramatic representation is Ramlila, a kind of pantomimic mimicries of some notable incidents in the life of Divine Rama. It was something like the exhibition of Miracle plays on moving platforms in Elizabethan times. It is a pageant show after all but kept the memory of

dramatic representation alive. There were two parti combating each other and we have some trace of it eve now and this. during the Mohomedan period, remaine the only emblem of the past glory of India in her dram and stage.

Thus disappeared the golden era of dramatic Indi and a little of what remained was confined to Beng only. Bengal henceforth could alone be credited wi worthily maintaining reputation of having, drama. art an stage and henceforth we shall mainly confine our attentic to the Bengali Drama and the Bengali Stage.

CHAPTER VI

CHAITANYA-PERIOD

It has already been pointed out in the last chapter that with the progress of the Mohomedan rule in India, Indian drama began to decline. Indian art and literature, in particular departments, no doubt received great support from the Mohomedan rulers, but it was a dark day for the Indian stage. In Bengal, however, a new era dawned with the rise of Sri Chaitanya and his followers. Sri Chaitanya not only brought a new light in religion, but infused a new life into Bengali society, and with it revived Bengali literature and art. He, in fact, rejuvinated the the country by his devotion, love and ardour, and was at the root of the Bengali renaissance in poetry, drama, music and in several other branches of Bengali culture and art. Even the Jatra had its origin in his time. The late Deshabandhu C. R. Das, therefore, used to remark that Sri Chaitanaya was "not a man, but an Epoch."

Perhaps, the first drama that was written in Bengal is Veni-Samhar. It is a martial piece written in Sanskrit.

Adisura,* the then ruler of Bengal, at the time of performing the Rajshuya Sacrifice brought down five Brahmins from Kanoje (or Kanwakubja, as it was then

* The date of Adisur is uncertain. The modern research on this point has unsettled the traditional views. Without entering into this problem which is ——— irrelevant I refer to Bengal's History 1st vol. by Babu pp 238.

called) and Bhattanarayan, the author of the Veni-Samhar, was one of them.

The drama is based upon an incident of the Mahabharata. In the frightful war between the Kurus and the Pandavas, Bheem braided the hair of Draupadi with the blood of Dushyasana. The drama, of course, differs greatly from the Mahabharat.

The second drama that was written in Bengal was by the devout poet, Joydeva, the illustrious composer of the sweet Sanskrit lyric, Geeta-Govinda. The play was named "Prasanna Raghava" and it was in sanskrit. After its composition, Bengal slipped off from the hands of the Hindu king, Lakshman Sen,* and came under the Moslem rule in the year 1199 A. D.

Joydeva's Gita Govinda, † though not a drama, supplied no end of themes for Theatres and Jatra, and Prof. J. J. Klein regards "Gita Govinda as a divine ideal or a mystery play of the Hindus," ‡ and it is this poem that influenced Prof. Macdonell to start a new theory about the origin of Drama.

And this is what Prof. Macdonell says, "The Gita Govinda is concerned with Krishna, and the modern Jatras really represent scenes from the life of that deity. From all this it seems likely that the Indian drama was

---

* Lakshman Sen's date is yet uncertain. Mr Rakhal Das Banerjee opines that Lakshman Sen died in 1170 A D. at the latest. So he can not be conquered by Bakhtier Khilji either at 1199 A D. or 1203. This again is a controversial point and it would be irrelevant for me to discuss the matter at length here.

† In all probability it was composed by the middle of the 12th Century when Laksman Sen was on the throne of Bengal and Joydev was his court-poet.

‡ Das Drama Vol 1. 1. p. 197

developed in connection with the cult of Vishnu—Krishna and the earliest acted representations were, therefore, like the mysteries of the Christian middle ages, a kind of religious plays in which the scenes from the legend of the Gods were enacted mainly with the aid of songs and dances supplemented with prose dialogues improvised by the performers"*

The futility of this argument of Dr. Macdonell has been discussed in page 21, and we do not like to add anything more. At the time of Chandi Das, the immortal Bengali poet of love, there was no drama, but there is enough of dramatic materials in his famous lyrics about Srikrishna's life and his immortal love.

In fact, in Chandidas's Krishna Kirtan, which though mostly consists of songs, lyrical genius seems to be united with a dramatic spirit.

Amativeness and amorous love were the key-note of Vidyapati's lyrics, and of the other contemporaries of Chandi Das. These amorous ditties are divided into three parts viz :—

Yearning before the union, Union, and Separation. Interrogations and replies recorded in these songs have enough dramatic elements in them. Krishna Kirtan was nothing but the Jhumur of modern Bengal. The subject matter of Krishna Kirtan was arranged like that of Jhumur.

The Sangit Damodar describes Jhumur as a piece of composition where there is no metrical restriction, but what is sweet as 'Madhurika' and where there is predominance of amative spirit.

* History of Sanskrit Literature.

प्रायः शृङ्गारबहुला माध्वीकमधुरा मृदु
एकैव झुमुरिर्लोके वर्णादि नियमोज्झिता ।

सङ्गीत दामोदर

In Krishna Kirtan, as in Jhumur now-a-days, some relationship was fancifully attributed between the two parties that might consist of two, three or four, as between Krishna and Radha, or with "Barai" i e. who brought about the union between Sri Krishna and Radha, as in mythology Naroda often effected union between the devotee and his God. In Krishna Kirtan, interrogations, replies, retorts were like that of Jhumur of the present time.*

Bengali drama, however, revived in the time of Lord Sri Chaitanya. Sri Chaitanya himself was fond of drama and was highly skilled in dramatic performance. His performance was of such a finished character that the audience was kept spell-bound by his acting and dancing. Being inspired by His example many devout poets wrote several religious plays. After this, Bengal learnt to appreciate drama, and almost all the Bengali dramatists were the followers of Lord Gouranga.

Girish Chandra, the greatest dramatist of Bengal, has thus alluded to Srichaitanya's histrionic art in his "Chaitanyalila":—A neighbour asks, "well, why Nemai gave up acting ? † It was really a very enjoyable thing. He used to play the role of Radha, and every one was extremely pleased with his performance, his songs and dancings."

This is fully borne out by the Vaishnava treatises of

* There are sufficient materials in Srikrishna Kirtan which are common in drama.

† The word in the original is Jatra.

that time. Vrindavan Das, the author of Chaitanya Bhagavat, has written that Srichaitanya used to perform "Krishna Lila" before the devout people who could appreciate those things. Vrindavan Das was born in the time of Srichaitanya. After Lord Gouranga's return from Gaya, one day, he said to Budhimanta Khan, "there will be performance within Chandra Shekhar's house, make necessary arrangements for that." :—

"Collect bodice, Conch-bracelets, silken clothes, ornaments and proper dress of every body."

A canopy was raised. Haridas acted the part of the city-police officer (Kotwal) and Srivash Pandit appeared in the role of Narada, Sriram acted the part of Snātak, Nityananda of Barai, Adwaita of a devotee and Gouranga himself appeared in the role of Ruksmini.

The Lord said, "This day,
I shall dance as a woman ;
They who have conquered his senses.
Are only entitled to witness.
He alone will enter the house
Who can control his senses."
Thereupon Adwaita said, "My master !
I have not conquered my senses,
I shall not go there."
Srivash too repeated the same thing
The Master smilingly replied,
"If you do not go there then with whom shall I dance ?
You have nothing to fear,
You will be great ascetics this day
None will be fatuated by my sight."

After that Lord Gouranga came with His followers to Chandrashekhar's house and every one then got himself dressed according to his part. Lord Gouranga's mother, Sachi Devi came to witness the performance with her daughter-in-law, Vishnupriya. When the performance began, Mukunda invoked the customary blessings by reading the Nāndimukha. After that, Haridas appeared in the guise of the Kotwal producing a delightful surprise amongst the audience.

"The face was adorned with two big whiskers,
A huge turban on his head, and clad in a cloth.
He began to warn the audience with his big staff."

Then Srivash appeared on the stage in the character of Narada.

"Long white beard flowed on his breast
His body was marked with sandal all through
He looked around, with the Vina resting
On shoulder, and Kusha in his hand."

All cried out in joy at the devout words of Srivash; it seemed, as if, Narada himself had descended on earth.—

"That kind of image—that kind of speech and that kind of conduct!"

Mother Sachi was so much astonished that she could not recognise him and she asked Srivasha's wife Malini:—

"Is he the Pandit?"

Sachi fainted in deep emotion at the devout words of Srivash. Here, in the green room, Lord Gouranga was so deeply moved with feeling after dressing Himself as Rukmini—the spouse of Lord Srikrishna—that He could not recognise His own self.

"The Master could not recognise Himself
In the guise of Ruksmini.
He thought Himself to be the daughter of Vidarbha."

At midnight the Master entered the stage.

"The Master danced a marvellous dance
Assuming the form of a woman.
And His followers sang appropriate songs."

And Nityananda appeared in the form of an old Barai.

"He walked with a crooked gait
And was reeling with love."

And Lord Gouranga was so much absorbed in His assumed role that no body could recognise Him.

"No body from His dress could recognise
the Master."

Every one was so much charmed by the performance that no body noticed when the night was over.

"None in joy could know that the night
was over."

At the end, all stood up in loud cheers, but regretted that the night was over.

This performance by the brightest jewel of Bengal with his noble followers was indeed wonderful. The performance took place in 1507 A. D.

Though Srichaitanya was greatly fond of music and dancing, all His senses were under His control.

At the time, when Chaitanya Dev was in Puri, one day, when he was going to Jameswartola, a dancing girl attached to the temple of Puri (Devadashi) was singing

a song from the Geeta Govinda.* We get its reference in Chaitanya Charitamrita. Her sweet strains reached the Master's ears, and he was at once lost in divine rapture. He forgot whether a man or a woman was singing.

"The sweet notes of the Geet Govinda
Were sung in Gurjjari tune,
That charmed every body's mind,
Hearing that song, the Master was lost in
trance,
And did not know whether a man or a woman
did sing."

He became anxious to see the singer and began to walk fast. Brakes and thorns tore his flesh, but he did not pay any heed to that. At that time, his servant, Govinda, told the Master that a woman was singing. That roused Him to His senses. He thanked Govinda for this timely warning, because that would have proved disastrous.

"My death would ensue from the touch of
a woman."

Under the inspiration of this Superman, Rup Goswami wrote beautiful dramas about Radha and Krishna. But those plays were written not in Bengali, but in Sanskrit in accordance with the some-what new idea of rhetoric and poetics which was Rupa-Goswami's own, and which differed in some points from those of the pre-Chaitanya

* The song, that was sung in Gurjara-ragini runs thus :—

रतिसुखसारे गतमभिसारे मदनमनोहर वेशम्।
न कुरु नितम्बिनि गमनविलम्बन मनुसर तं हृदयेशं॥
धीर समीरे यमुनातीरे वसति वने वनमाली।
पीनपयोधर-परिसर-मर्द्दन   युग शाली॥

period. At that time, Orissa was under the Hindu rule, and drama and histrionic art, free from all restraints, greatly flourished in that holy place under an independent ruler and under the influence of Sri Chaitanya. Ramananda Rai also contributed much towards the development of drama.

Ramananda Rai was born in a Kayastha family. Girish Chandra Ghose, the founder of the modern Bengali stage, seemed to have some affinities with Ramananda Rai.

We think, we should give a brief account of Ramananda and of his contribution to the growth of the Bengali dramas.

Ramananda Rai was not only a dramatist, but he also influenced the dramas of his time in a great measure.

When Sri Chaitanya was out on pilgrimage in the Dekkan, during that journey, one day He was singing the glory of Lord Sri Krishna on the banks of the Godavari.

"At that moment—Ramananda Rai came with a fan fare, riding a palanquin to take his bath.

हेनकाले दोलाय चडि रामानन्द राय
स्नान करिवारे आइला वाजना बाजाय ।

The two then met and embraced each other. Sri Chaitanya wanted to hear about Sri Krishna from him. For ten long days Ramananda talked about Rasatattwa, or Divine love.

कृष्णतत्त्व राधातत्त्व प्रेमतत्त्व सार
रसतत्त्व लीलातत्त्व विविधप्रकार—

"Krishnatattwa Radhatattwa and various kinds of Rasatattwa and various kinds of Lila."

As the Sutradhar explains the drama to the actor

(as the rider opens his heart to the charioteer) Rai likewise explained the truth about Srikrishna, Radha and their divine love.

Rai said, "I am the actor and Thou art the
Sutradhar—(आमि नट तुमि सूत्रधार)
And I dance as you make me dance."

When questioned about the object of worship, Ramananda Rai spoke about popular religion, i.e. about following one's own creed, about dedicating everything to Srikrishna, and about worshipping Sri Krishna with the devotion of a servant i.e. a man's relation to God is as between the Master and the servant, or to look upon Sri Krishna with filial affection or with friendly love, i.e. as one's own child, or one's friend. But Sri Chaitanya only replied by saying—

"This too is superficial—एहो बाह्य आगे कह आर।
Tell me something futher."

But Rai said—

"कान्तभाव (Relation betweet the lover and the beloved) is
the highest phase of love."

That is to look upon Srikrishna as the Lord of one's heart, is the highest form of worship and love.

ButRai could not proceed further, because—

"The climax of love is the deepest emotion of heart
The personification of that Divine transport is
worshipful Radha."

And that love :—

"Spontaneous as the love of the Gopis, surely
it is not lust ;
Their amorous sports are free from lust."

Rai explained with graceful ease the great mysteries of love to Sri Chaitanya—

"As if Narayan taught the Vedas to Brahma."

After this, Rai Ramananda renounced his wealth and came to live with Sri Chaitanya at Puri.

One day, devout Pradyumna Misra was directed by Sri Chaitanya to go to Ramananda Rai and to hear from him about Sri Krishna.

Pradyumna Misra on going there, heard from a servant that Ramananda Rai had been coaching the Devadashis (nautch girls attached to the temple) in histrionic art.

"Two of the Devadashis were exquisitely beautiful
They were young, and skilled in music and dancing.
Taking those two in his garden
He was coaching them the songs of a drama."

Ramananda was not only a dramatist, but he trained Devadashis to perform dramas about Sri Krishna Lila* and Gouranga Lila.

"Then he taught the two, the art of dancing.

And explained the underlying significance of the songs.

And having inspired lasting, holy emotion.
Made it manifest on their eyes and expression."

Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita Anta Lila Chap. 5.

Misra came back disgusted and reported everything to Sri Chaitanya.

Hearing everything, Sri Chaitanya said, "Ramananda

* Tattwa in page 9 last but one line truth and all the mysteries

is not an ordinary person. Though I am an ascetic, I feel myself moved by the name of woman, not to speak of her sight. Nobody can remain unmoved in the presence of a woman, but Ramananda is absolutely indifferent in their presence, in the midst of luxury and wealth."

"Not only a Devadashi, but a youthful beauty.
He was looking after her person.
He anointed her and made her wear a fine cloth.
Her various parts were thus touched and seen by him,
Still Ramananda's mind was quite calm and unmoved!
And he taught her various expressions of emotions.
Unperturbed were his body and mind,
Like a log of wood, or stone!
Wonderful! His mind was undisturbed by the touch of a young woman".

Ramananda Rai alone was fit for such a risky task.
Bhāgavat bears testimony to such things;
"As Sri Krishna's sport with the women of Braja".

व्रजवधू सङ्गे कृष्णेर रासादि विलास

Chaitanya Lila—Anta Lila.

After that, Misra gained much wisdom after hearing Krishna Tattwa from Ramananda Rai. This Ramananda wrote in sanskrit a darma named "Jagannāth Vallabha". This drama, along with other books, was a favourite study of Chaitanya Deva. We get its reference in Chaitanya Charitamrita :—

चण्डीदास विद्यापति, रायेर नाटक गीति
कर्णामृत श्रीगीतगोविन्द
स्वरूप रामानन्द सने महाप्रभु रात्रिदिने
गाय शुने परम आनन्दे ।

We have gone into details to give an idea of the drama composed by him and the dramas of Rupa Goswami inspired by Ramananda.

At the direction of Pratap-Rudra, the king of Puri the drama was acted in the temple of Jagannath. Devadashis, instructed and coached by Ramananda, acted the female parts of the drama. What deep hatred, the enemies of Gouranga bore for this against him, has been hinted by Grish Chandra in the "Nemai Sanyasa."

There the first courtier says: "See this Ramananda is a sanctimonious knave. He rides an elephant in all pomp and says Gour Gour in a trumpeting voice." Second Courtier:—"You are mistaken, He is a knave. He lives with prostitutes in his garden, He bathes their bodies, dresses their hair and yet he pretends to be a highly devout person! The king seems to have gone mad. Lord Jagannath is there, but still the king calls Gour, Gour.

—(*Nemai Sannyasa Act 1, Sec. 1.*)

Such a devotee was Ramananda, and he did a lot for the dramas of that time. Though Gouranga was a lover of drama, still irrational and bad dramas were despised by him.

At one time, a Bengal Brahmin (one from East Bengal) wrote a drama about Chaitanya Deva and came to read it to him. The Brahmin stopped at the house of Bhagavan Acharya. The Acharya and some Vaishnavas praised the composition. Then the Acharya made over the drama to Swarupa Damodar so that it might be read before the Master (Lord Gouranga). Swarupa acted like a censor of the Master and nothing was read before the Lord unless Swarupa approved of it.

"If emotions suggested were against truth,
The Lord could not brook that ;
He felt annoyed at heart."

Swarupa then said "Every body can not write a drama. He who does not know how to express his feelings, he that has no knowledge of dramatic art and rhetoric, cannot delineate Krishna-Lila especially the difficult Lila of Sri Chaitanya."

At great importunities, however, Swarup agreed to hear the drama read to him.

The poet first read the invocation of the drama—नान्दीश्लोकः

"The poet says Jagannath is beautiful,
Master Chaitanya is a beautiful person.
In order to infuse life into dead matter,
The Lord has come to Nilāchal." (*Puri.*)

Everyone praised the invocation verse, but Swarupa remarked with regret:

"Oh, You fool! Thou hast committed wrong.
It seems you have no faith in God,
Jagannath is full of consciousness and love,
But thou hast made him dead and gross.
Chaitanya Himself is God, full of Divine attributes,
But thou hast depicted him as a common man.
For making this distinction you will have to
  suffer.
Another great wrong you have done
By distinguishing body and soul in God,
There is no n in spirit and form of God."

Jagannath, in fact, is not a mere wooden image. He is the image of Brahmah in wood.

After that, by the advice of Swarupa, and by living with the followers of Lord Gouranga, the Brāhmin, at last, obtained blessings of the Lord.

In fact, a sweet drama full of sentiments रसभावयुक्त can never be written by an ordinary person. It requires much preparation.

What Lord Gouranga had heard for several days from Ramananda Rai, we have already described before. He taught Rupa Goswami those sacred truths about Sri Krishna for ten long days at Allahabad (Prayag).

After that instruction, Rup Goswami became fit for writing dramas.

> The Master infused strength into Rupa's heart
> And made him wise after explaining every tattwa."
>
> —(*Madhya Lila Chapter 19.*)

Then Lord Gouranga asked Rupa to start for Vrindavan and He Himself set forth for Benares. The master asked Rupa to come to Him from Vrindavan at Nilachal after visiting Gour.

Rup Goswami wrote a drama about Radha Krishna in Vrindavan.

Rupa came to Vrindavan at the behest of the Lord and devoted himself to writing a drama about Krishna Lila.

In Vrindavan, and during his journey through Gour (in the province of Bengal) Rupa thought about the subject matter of the drama and made a sketch of it. In Gour,

his younger brother, Anupama, father of Jiva Goswami died, and Rupa then alone came to Puri.

In Orissa, in the Satyabhāmā-Puri, a nymph appeared to him in his dream and said : आमार नाटक पृथक् करह रचन ;

"Write a separate drama about me.
Through my grace there will be plenty of
dramatic skill."

Rupa was so long describing Vraja Lila. Now at the dictation of Satya Bhama he thought of describing the Mathur Lila in the second part of the drama.

He came to Puri and stopped at Haridas's house. The Lord introduced Rupa to his followers, Adwaita Nityananda and others.

One day, Lord Gouranga said in a trance, "Rupa, do not drag out my Krishna from Vraja.

"Do not bring out Krishna from Vraja.
Krishna never goes leaving Vraja."

Rupa then decided to write two separate plays according to the wishes of Sri Chaitanya and Satyabhama about Vraja Lila and Mathur Lila. He even conceived of two separate invocation verses (Nandimukha) for the two dramas.

On the day of the Ratha Jātrā, seeing Lord Gouranga proceeding dancing and singing before the Ratha (the Car of Jagannath) Rupa could understand his Master's wish, and wrote the Nandimukha Verse describing the great Yearning for Union on the banks of the Jamuna.

"मनो मे कालिन्दापुलिन विपिनाय स्पृहयति"

Rupa wrote the verse on a palm-leaf and leaving it in his hut went for a sea-bath. Lord Gouranga in

Rupa's absence came to his hut and not having found Rupa there, He began to read the palm-leaf. By reading the sloka, the Lord was lost in a trance. and when Rupa returned, the Master asked him—

"गूढ मोर हृदय तुमि जानिले केमने ?"

"How could you know the secrets of my heart ?"

After this, at the direction of the Master, the invocation verse of the "Vidagdha Madhava Nataka" was read before Ramananda Rai, Sarvabhauma, Swarup and others. Inspite of shyness, he read the second sloka at the request of Ramananda Rai, in which he had described his deity of of worship, Basudev, as :—

"अनर्पितचरी चिरात् करुणावतीर्णः कलौ—
समर्पयितुमुन्नतोज्ज्वलरसां स्वभक्तिश्रियं—
हरि पुरट सुन्दरद्युति कदम्बसन्दीपितः
सदा हृदयकन्दरे स्फुरतु वः शचीनन्दनः।"

"The image of mercy that glows in the dark recess of the heart, the darling of Sachi."

Hearing that the Lord said,

"This is but a panegyric".

Rai after questioning Rupa brought out many verses of his and then submitted to the Lord after praising the poetry of Rupa as if with hundred tongues,

"It is no poetry but nectar pure : all the elements of drama are there."

In this drama, Srikrishna's various sports, as playing upon the flute, theft of the flute by Radha, Srikrishna's union and amorous dalliance with Radha have been described.

This drama was first performed in Vrindavan at the Keshitirtha before the holy pilgrims at the direction of Gopeswar Mahādeva in dream. This drama was translated into Bengali by Jadu Nandan Das. The drama called the "Radha Krishna Lila-Rasa-Kadamva" by Jadunandan Chakravarty seems to have been written in imitation of Rup Goswami's drama. There is a line in the Bengali drama which suggests this idea :—

"Hear me, O sister. the wonderful tale of Gora
The world has come to know of His amorous
Sports with the women of Vraja."

Jadunandan Das also translated into Bengali—"Sri-Krishna Karnamirta," the sanskrit work of the well-known devotee Vilwamongal, a play that has much dramatic elements in it.

After the composition of the Vidagdha Madhava, Rup Goswami wrote another drama "Lalit Madhava Nataka." It was also read before the Master and his associates. Every body praised the piece enthusiastically.

Then the Master said, "I imparted strength to introduce works of reverential faith (Bhakti) and I sent Rupa and Sanatana to Vrindavan to restore that place of pilgrimage and to learn the real nature of sweetness and love."

Rai Ramananda said :

"Thou art God, you can do what you will,
You can make even a wooden doll dance,
What you preached through my mouth,
I find all in this writing."

After this, Rup Goswami wrote another drama named "Dankeli Nataka" consisting of one act in 1533 A. D

The drama is a witty allegory, where Sri Krishna stops Sri Radha and her maidens on the banks of the Jamuna to realise a toll-tax from them.

After this, the only worth-mentioning drama is "Chaitanya Chandrodaya Nataka", written by Paramananda Sen. He was a great devotee of Gouranga, and Lord Gouranga gave him the title of Kavikarnapura. The Chaitanya Chandrodaya was written in Sanskrit in 1579 A.D. Krishnadas Kaviraj, the famous author of Chaitanya Charitamirta, has quoted many slokas from the Chaitanya Chandrodaya *

The drama deals with certain notable incidents of Sri Chaitanya's life in an allegorical manner. There Kali and Adharma i.e. atheism and impiety, play important parts.

Before this, no book was written depicting Chaitanya as an Avatar (or as an incarnation of God.) But Nityananda, Advaita and others being directed by visions began to give out Chaitanya as God to the world. The devout poet here also has described his Guru as an Avatar in the drama.

In 1703 A.D. Premdas (Purushattam Misra) saw Chaitanya Deva in a dream and translated Chaitanya Chandradoya into Bengali verse.

In his "Bansi Siksha", Premdas has written, "In 1634 Shaka era. I composed Sri Chaitanya Chandrodaya."

We find traces of another drama in Sanskrit from the pen of a Bengali. It is written in Prem Vilash (sacred book of the Vaishnabas) that Govinda Das (1537—1612) wrote a drama Sangita Madhava Natak under the orders

* The date of Chaitanya Chan[illegible]ta is likely to be 1615 A.D

of Ray Santosh Dutt who organised a great congregation of the Vaishnabas in Kheturi This drama describes the पूर्व्वराग (yearning between Radha and Krishna);

Prem Vilash (20th Vilash.)

There cannot be any doubt that dramas flourished to a great extent in the time of Sri Chaitanya. But Drama though born in Bengal, reached its perfection in Orissa.

After this, dramatic art in Bengal remained confined to the Jatra, Kavi, Pānchāli, Kirtan and Kathakata till the rise of the English power in the country. We shall now speak about them.

CHAPTER VII.

JATRAS.

THE ORIGIN OF THE JATRA

In 1199 A.D.* Bakhtyer Khiliji conquered Bengal; six years before this, Prithwiraj was defeated by Mahamed Ghori. 558 years after this, Bengal fell into the hands of the English in the year 1757 A.D. More than 100 years after that, Bengali dramas first came to be acted upon the stage. But were the Bengalis without every kind of amusement during these six and half centuries?

We have already seen how poetry, music and even drama flourished under the influence of Chaitanya Dev. At that time Jatras and Kavis too began to make their headway in the country.

A Jatra resembles a drama in good many things in its outward form, but a Jatra has no scene, curtain, or stage, and there is more abundance of songs in a Jatra than in a drama. Almost all actors of the Jatra sing, being seated in the place of the performance, and only two or three stand up and declare a succeeding event either through their speech or song. But inspite of all

* The year 1203 A.D has been rejected by upto date

outward resemblance between the two, the spirit of a Jatra differs essentially from that of a drama. The end of a Jatra generally is to play upon some popular feelings and emotions, such as heroism, devotion and love; where as the end of a drama is the creation of characters and their delineations with reference to some particular event or situation. This world is a field of action, and the active man either builds, or breaks himself, and his soul manifests itself through his actions. This action is the soul of a drama; but amplification of sentiments and feelings rather than action constitutes the main key-note of a Jatra-performance.

In all civilised nations there is a strong love for drama, because our own life is a part of the mundane drama that is acted around us.

"All the world's a stage
All the men and women merely players"

(*As You Like It.*)

Though a Jatra can not fully satisfy the cravings of the educated and cultured but in the absence of dramas and of dramatic performances, it tried to preserve their tradition as best as it could. The Jatra, is, in fact, a dramatic expedient of the country.

The Jatra was in existence from a long time, and it formerly meant some festivity held in honour of the gods. From the journeys of Jagannath, as Snān Jātrā, Ratha Jatra, Punarjatra, the term Jatra might have been derived. Jatra has been mentioned in Bharata's "Natya Shastra." In Bhavabhuti's "Malati Madhava" the word "Jatra" has been used in the sense of a festivity and also in a

"Jatra dealt with mythical and

pauranic legends. Religious and social festivities were combined in the Jatra.

In ancient Greece, drama arose out of the worship of Bacchus; in India, the origin of drama is associated with the religious festivities of old. In Europe, the circumstances in which mystery and "miracle-plays" rose were similar to the circumstances in which the Jatra began to flourish in Bengal.

Some people think that Indian Theatre has evolved out of the Jatra, and Buddha's fondness for dramatic shows, that has been alluded to in the "Lalit Vistar Purana," refers in their opinion, to the Jatra, and not to any theatrical performance. But even some dialogues in the Vedas have been pointed out as the basis of subsequent Jatra. Mr. E. P. Horwitz writes:—"Even the Vedic age knew Jatras, a memorable heirloom of Aryan antiquity. The gods of the Rigveda were hymned in choral processions. Some of the Sām Veda hymns re-echo the rude mirth of the primitive Jatra dances."

(The Indian Theatre p. 178.)

Dr. Hertel regards the Jatras of Bengal as constituting a distinct age in the evolution of Indian drama.

We, however, cannot agree with these scholars. Jatras and theatres might have a common origin, but Indian drama is the fruit of high Aryan culture, and perfection was reached both in its composition as well as in its exhibition upon the stage But when drama declined under an antagonistic influence, the Jatras began to come

JATRA DISTINGUISHED FROM THEATRE

The modern Jatra that is now performed, is nothing but an imitation of a theatrical performance, and it has no connection with the dramatic representation of ancient India. We, therefore, maintain that both the Jatra and the Theatre might have a common origin but one has not evolved out of the other, but the two followed two different lines of growth. This opinion has also been held by Dr. A. Berriedale Keith :—

"The dramas of the ritual. therefore, are in a sense somewhat out of the main line of the development of the drama, and the popular side has survived through ages in rough way in the Yatras, well-known in Bengal, while the refined and sacridotalised ? Vedic drama passed away without a direct descendant"

(*The Sanskrit Drama, Page 16.*)

In fact, when a dramatic performance was forbidden under the Mahomedan rule, Jatras dealing with religious and mythological themes came into existence.

The ancient Jatras that were prevalent in Bengal were about the cult of Sakti worship, and dealt mainly with the death of Sambhu, Nisambhu, or of other Asuras. In one sense we can regard Chandi as a piece of dramatic literature. In this drama, we find one Madhu, two Kaitabhas, three Mahisāsuras, fourth Shumbhu, fifth Nishumbhu were killed. The first two were killed by Vishnu and the last three were killed by Chandi herself.

At that time, there was no Krishna Jatra. Krishna Jatras came into being after the rise of Vaishnavism in the country When Vaishnavism spread under the

influence of Sri Chaitanya, then alone Krishna Jatras reached their fullest development. and from that came the popular adage, "Kānu binā Geet nāi"— that is, there is no song without Kanai (Krishna).

The great lyrics of Joydeva, Chandidas, Vidyapati and of other Vaishnava poets as we have shown before, are full of dramatic elements, and they supplied sufficient materials for the Krishna Jatras. In Joydeva's Geet-Govinda, there are conversations between Srikrishna, Radha and the maids of Radha: in Krishna Jatras also same sort of conversations is to be found. The themes of Jatras were about the great Yearning and Love of Srikrishna and Radha. The audience was moved to tears by those devout themes.

Prof. Horace H. Wilson says,—

"The Yatra is generally the exhibition of some of the incidents in the youthful life of Krishna, maintained also in extempore dialogues, but interspersed with popular songs."—(*The Theatre of the Hindus Vol, I. Intro. P. XV-XVI*).

Mr. E. P. Horwitz writes :—

"All Yatras were like sacred operas.........frequently produced in connection with the religious processions of Krishnaits."

Indian Theatre, P. 198.

Dr. Earl Mantzius, one of the most leading European authorities on theatre and stage-craft, finds it "natural to suppose that these popular religious plays mark an earlier stage development in the Indian drama than the tranditional art poems of the middle ages and to draw the

conclusion that ancient scenic art was closely connected with the worship of Vishnu."

Indeed, incidents of the life of Sri Krishna play an important part in the evolution of our musical entertainments and though not the origin of dramas, helped a great deal in the growth of Yatras and dramas.

KRISHNA JATRAS

Every Krishna Jatra meant Kaliya Daman or the suppression of the Serpent Kaliya Whatever might have been the subject,—Dān or Māthur, people used to designate every Jātrā as the Kāliya Damana. Even now-a-days many people call it by this name.

The Bangadarsan (the famous monthly started by Bankim Chandra) writes in the Falgun number of 1289 B.S. :—

"It is more than forty years that Kaliya Daman Yatra has disappeared. It came into existence after the rise of Chaitanya Dev, and it died after that of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. 'Kāliya Damana' was alive for about four hundred years."

It appears that the time from the advent of Sri Chaitanya or earlier from Geeta Govinda to 1840 (about 350 years) may be taken as the period of Kāliya Daman Jatras. Before that Sakti Yatra, Chandi's songs and Manasha's songs were prevalent in the country.

About this Pandit Dwarika Nath Vidyabhusan wrote in his "Somaprokash" :—

"It is said that there were Yatras before the birth of

Sri Chaitanya, but those Yatras were about themes concerned with Sakti. At that time there was no Krishna Yatra."

As there is Nāndi Mukh (or Prelude) in the drama so there is Gourchandrika (or pre-amble) in the Jatra and Kirtons.

Rup Goswami in his "Vidagdha Madhava" and "Lalit Madhava" has edified Chaitanya Dev as his Guru At that time to sing of the glory of Chaitanya Deva was considered as an indispensable part of an auspicious act specially in musical performances. This hymn of praise in glory of Gour (SriChaitanya) is known as Gour-Chandrika and it preceded every performance of Yatra. Whether Yatras flourished before or after Sri Chaitanya Deva, the influence of Gouranga Deva over the Yatras is quite evident from this.

It is extremely difficult to get a connected history of Jatra from the beginning till now. Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitter, the famous antiquarian, has thus written in Bengali journal called "Vividhārtha Sangraha":—

"A resident of Keduli village named Sishuram Adhikary, a Brahmin by caste, secured the glorious perfection of the Jatra; before that a miserable mimicry in imitation of the theatre prevailed in the country. That too almost disappeared in the rush of Sankirtans and Kavi. Jatra revived from the time of Sishuram. After Sishuram, Sridam. Subal and after him Parmananda and others worked for the regeneration of Jatra."

There were, of course other Jatrawalas before Sishuram but unfortunately we possess no of them

The performance in which Gouranga Deva Himself took part in the yard of Buddhimonta Khan's house may be designated both by the name of Yatra and theatre as Sangitshālā or "uthān" is mentioned also in "Natya-shastra." We have already mentioned that there were many characters in this performance and each one was dressed in his particular manner.

Formerly, the Sakti Yatras which had no special name,—were simply known as Yatras. But with the progress of Krishna Yatras, the Yatra acquired a special name as the the Kāliya Daman. Why Yatra came to be known by this appellation has been accounted for by the "Banga Darsan" of 1289 B. S.—

"By that time, a Vaishnava adopted a new device and performed a Yatra on the surface of the tank. The tank was beautifully decorated and it was named "Kaliya Hrada". In the middle of the tank lay the formidable serpent Kaliya spreading out its hood and upon it stood Krishna playing on his flute, and occasionally, dancing with revolving eyes. Kaliya became greatly oppressed by the dancing of Sri krishna. On all the sides of Kaliya, with joined palms to spare their husband, raising halves of their bodies above the surface of the water his wives implored Sri Krishna sometimes in songs and sometimes in prose. Close by stood a raised platform above the water on which Mridangas, Karatāl, Kholas and other musical instruments were kept, and the Yatrawalas (i.e., the musicians and performers) being seated there, were singing "Doarki" (the catches of songs). The audience greatly enjoyed this Yatra, so the name of this Yatra became famous, and every Krishna Jatra came to be known by this particular "

When Yatras took up other subjects besides Kaliya Daman, people still extended the name of Kalia Daman to other Yatras.

JATRA IN BHĀRAT CHANDRA'S TIME

So far as we could gather, a little before the battle of Plassey, two brothers named Sridam and Subal acquired great reputation by their performance of Kāliyadaman.

Then proceeds Bangadarsahna :—"There was a great upheaval in the country. There was a general stir all over. At that time the Bargis ceased from their periodical raids, the Muslims lost their kingdom and trade, commerce and influence of the East India Company increased. Silk, cotton, thān and kora of Bengal became objects of great prize to the foreigners. At that time, Kavi, Kirtan, literature and art all flourished to a great extent. Such progress was not seen in later times. At that time Bharat Chandra was the writer, Lalu Nandalal was Kavi singer, the singer of Kirtans was Bānchharam Bairagi, the speaker or Kathak of the Purana was Gadadhar Kathak and Yatrawalas were Sridam and Subal."

"Each and every one of them was a poet, therefore could be the Gurus (teacher) of Bengal. Though the case is different with Bharat Chandra, poetry of other poets however helped to inspire affection and love in the hearts of the Bengalees and that current of soft emotions still flows in Bengalee hearts. The Vaishnavas are by nature disposed towards tender motions so Vaishnavism was greatly enriched at that time through the infl of

"PARMA'S TUKKO"

In Sridam Subal's party, a boy named Parmananda Dass used to appear in the role of a (ballet girl) waiting maid or Sakhee. The boy was born in Taba, a village in the District of Hooghly. He had no pompous dress, but as he was very fat, he would put on two pieces of Sari (cloth worn by women) which he would often ask from the house of performance. He used to put on Veshar on his nose and put on ornaments as he could procure by asking. He never brought any Khol or Kartal with him. Thus he used to run the whole show by acting the part of a Duti (or a female go-between). Krishna and Radhika were but nominal characters. He used to speak for all and the audience laughed or wept at his words.

Whoever had the opportunity to witness Parma's Yatra, well remembered how he used to dally with two young loving hearts, when he sang :—"New, ever new and whenever is seen always appears to be new नवरे नव नितुइ नव." He would sometimes bring the two nearer to each other or would remove them further and would exhibit the restlessness of their hearts. His power was seen at its height when he would represent wounded vanity or spirit of sullenness of Radha i.e. "Mān". "Mān" मान was the only drama of Bengal and perhaps it was the first dramatic performance in Bengal. There was not too much abundance of songs in Parma's Yatra. For producing poetic effect Parma used dialogues in greater proportion and the songs that followed those conversations were composed in Payer (or rhymed couplets) and they were often sung in the tune with which payars were used to be sung At the last end of that rhymed couplets, he used to sing in the tune of

Kirtan and that distilled nectār to the ears of the audience. That was known as "Tukko" and Parmananda was its creator. Herein we give some specimens of Tukko below :—

मारावन घुरे धुले
वनफुल आनलाम तुले
तार बोंटागुलि दिलाम फेले
तोमार श्यामङ्गे बाजिवे ब'ले ।

"Ravaging the whole forest
I have gathered wild flowers
And have cast aside their stalks
Fearing they might hurt thy tender skin."

Here is another :—

"My lord ! My darling, my sweet heart
What were you saying at the time of departure ?
What were you saying from the chariot ?
Your words remained closed within your lips
And fears flowed in stream."

There was another special trait of Parma. The audience had to listen to him from the beginning to the end. In those days the Yatrawala tried to rouse poetic feelings and emotions in the audience. When a Yatrawala found that his performance was not up to the liking of the audience, he would then introduce clowns and jesters to amuse the audience and then he would try the thing again.

"PREMCHAND"

At the time of Parmananda, there was another famous Jatrawala named Premchand People generally called him Tharkatā Prema This Premchand had no Tukko.

He sang Chaupadis (four lines). Besides what he sang he used to polish them a little. People could not understand old poems of the famous Vaishnava poets. Premchand therefore, rendered those lyrics into simple words. He would sometimes compose very nice things by mixing up popular words with the old pieces. People were greatly moved by them. From that time it cleared the way for singing Kirtans by women. Formerly it was forbidden to listen to Kirtans sung by a woman.

—*Bangadarshan 1289 B.S.*

Premchand's boy Badan when he grew up followed the example of his master and performed Kaliya Daman but Parmananda's boy—the well-known Govinda Das Adhikary first followed his preceptor and afterwards used to sing as he liked.

At that time everybody and even Poet Iswar Chandra Gupta was fond of Dāsarathi's alliterations. Govinda too delighted the ears of his audience by the same. He gave up old Tukko, and by introducing alliterations he made Yatra a success. But Badan did not give up Tukko. But he improved the same in his Yatra. Kaliya Daman, however, disappeared with Badan. Badan's son, Khetra, his nephews Jadu Nath and Braja Nath (who acted as boy-players in Badan's Yatra) continued Tukko for some time. But they gave up Yatra in a short time.

GOVINDA ADHIKARY

Govinda Adhikary was a resident of Jahangir Para in Krishnanagar. He was born probably in 1798 A.D. At first he acted the part of a Duti (a go-between) in "Kaliya " People flocked to see his perfo ce,

Govinda charmed the audience so much by his devout songs full of emotional elements and alliterations, that people from distant quarters came to hear his Yatra, and the place was crammed to its utmost capacity. His theme of Shuka and Shāri, quarrel between Churā and Nupur (coronet and anklets) attracted many a person of that time.

When he sang—

"Hear me, anklets!
None but a good soul can know the sufferings
of the good
If a fool speaks laughingly
The good man tries to convince him in gentle
words.
But he cannot understand the true import of
those words."

The audience at once fell under the sway of his sweet music.

GOVINDA'S NEW STYLE

We shall now see why Govinda gave up his old Jatra. Krishna Jatra could not continue long on account of the internal troubles in Bengal. Moslems were not responsible for its extinction. They were quite indifferent as to what were sung or acted in Jatras. When the English came, Theatres revived in a new garb, but national recreations and amusements slowly disappeared from Bengal. With the rise of Calcutta, a number of up-country men came to the new city and began to mix with the people During the raids of the Bargis, young women came to Bengal as Bais (or professional

singers). People hankering after wealth became friendly to the Marwaris and the wealthy began to serve the Maharastra women.—*(Bangadarshan, 1259, B. S.)*

The Baijis did great injury to Bengalee music. Before them there was no professional songstress in Bengal. Kirtans were sung by men, as the Jatras were performed by them. Bengalee Kirtans and their tunes had spread up to the Punjab. But that music was destroyed by the advent of the Bāijis. The Baboos soon grew disgusted with the harsh and noisy sounds of Mridangas and Khols and became fond of the sweet sounds of Tabla. From that time light music—the tunes of Toppa songs and the musical sounds of Tabla keeping time with them—became popular in the country and the musicians of the Bengal school of music fell into disfavour. Their earnings were greatly reduced. Thus in course of time amateur yatras or Sakher Jatra took the place of the Krishna Jatras. (Ibid)

At that time too some Yatra parties came from north-west and south and did not fail to rouse popular enthusiasm for them. References to these Yatras are sometimes found in old newspapers of that time.:—

"Jatras of this season were chiefly dramatic representations of the loves of Krishna and the Gopees, performed by boys of the Kuttack tribe of the Brahmin caste and appeared to us to possess great resemblance to the ancient chorus of the Greeks"

('Asiatic Journal" 1816 July)

OTHER YATRAWALLAS

At the time of Govinda Adhikary, one Lochan Adhikary greatly delighted the people by singing the themes of "Akrura Samvad" and "Nemai Sannyasa." It is said that people shed so much tears being moved by the pathetic sentiments of Lochan's Yatras, that a certain wealthy man would never have Lochan's Yatra performed in his house.

At that time "Nala-Damayanti" Yatra and the Yatra of Vraja Mohan Adhikary and that of Ram Sundar Adhikary became very popular in the country. Next to the "Nala-Damayanti" Yatra, the "Vidya Sundar" Yatra known as Sakher Jatra became highly popular in the country

SAKHER JATRA OR AMATEUR JATRA

Once a few wealthy citizens of calcutta formed a Jatra party from a sprit of recreation and that Jatra came to be known as Sakher or Amateur Jatra. Those amateur Jatras were also called "Reformed Jatras."

We have already said that great changes were then going on in Bengal music. Khola and Nupurs gave place to Tobla and ghunghur. The old Vaishnaba lyric and songs (Mahajani Padas) were replaced by newly composed songs. They were set to new songs and the up-country tune of the tappās was gone These Yatras delighted the people greatly because they were new. When those Yatras became regularly professional parties, they were even then called Sakher Yatras or Yatra for recreation's sake. People [illegible] that to be a Sakher Yatra in which there were Dholoka and Tabla and

those in which there were Kholas and Kartals were called Kaliya-Daman. There was another distinction between the two. There could not be any theme in the Kaliya-Daman that was not concerned with the topics of Gods (i.e. a sacred subject). In the Sakher Yatras generally, "Vidya-Sundar" was performed, and occasionally "Nal-Damayanti" was acted. In course of time when Kaliya-Daman died out, the term "Sakher" also disappeared and the simple word 'Yatra' survived.

After the introduction of Vidya-Sundar, great changes were wrought in Yatras. After this the divine love-theme of Krishna and Radha yielded to the amours of ordinary human lovers Vidya and Sundara. The social history of Bengal had some connection with these innovations in Jatra.

Amongst the amateur Yatras, the Yatra party of Beltala and Ariadaha became greatly famous. What scanty history could be gathered about them is given below.

We do not know much about the origin of Sakher Yatra in Bow bazar (Calcutta) but it is said that a wealthy man named Radha Raman first formed an amateur Yatra party. But there is great doubt whether Radha Raman was first in the field or not.

The formation of an amateur Yatra party, so far as we could gather, seems to be at Ariyadaha, in 24 Pergs. district. In 1822 a Brahmin named Thakur Das Mukerjee formed a party in the name of his father Ramjoy Bharat Chandra's Vidya Sundar was not printed yet, sc he selected scenes from it from a manuscript copy o

the poem. Pran Krishna Tarkalankar and Nemai Mitra helped him in this matter. The following was the cast :—

Raja—Radha Mohan Chatterjee.
Sundara—Krishna Mohan Banerjee
Vidya—Ishan (son of Radha Raman Chatterjee.)
Rai Baghini—Nemai Ganguli.

The song of the Nāndi (in prologue) was sung by Nemai Mitra and Tara Chand Banerjee. Kali Bhattacharjee and Kebalram, good songsters, were also in the party.

Shortly after the performance, the founder and the master Thakurdas Babu and some other actors died. This was taken to be an inauspicious thing and the party was dissolved.

Naldamayanti of Bhowanipur party was very famous. We have the following from Samachar Darpan 13th July 1822 :—

"Naldamayanti Jatra has been performed by some rich men of Bhowanipur, the southern suburb of Calcutta. It will be superfluous to give any detailed account of the show; it is sufficient to inform our readers that there were dramatic representatious of Nala, Damayanti, ... interspersed with dialogues, songs and music. It was an excellent exhibition. A large sum of money raised by subscription has been spent by its organisers. Its first perfo------- was held on Saturday night, the 23rd Ashar in the house of Mukherji of Bhowanipur."

"The reputation of the Naldamayanti Jatra performed by the gentry of Bhowanipur is still in existence. Ram Basu composed all its songs and dialogues. Everybody was pleased with those songs and dialogues."

After this in South Baranagar and Janai two excellent Vidya Sundar Yatra parties were formed. In the south Baranagar, the Jatra party had the following cast :—

Malini—Sj. Madhu Bhattacherji.
Raja—Sj. Gopi Mohan Chatterji.
Nakib—Sj Radha Nath.
Vidya—Sj. Ram Chandra Bhaduri.
Sundara—Rupnarayan Banerjee.

Jagat Narayan Banerjee also acted the part of Vidya.

Sj. Madhu Bhattacherjee was an excellent speaker, a good singer and was a fine Kathak. He had also proficiency in Sanskrit. Gopimohan was a very handsome person and was cousin to Sj Kali Chatrerjee the famous athlete and wrestler of Baranagar well-known for cutting a buffalo with one stroke during the Durga Puja. They performed the Yatra at the neighbouring places specially at Uttarpara very successfully.

Before amateur Yatras came into existence, women never took any part in the Yatra performance. With this change women slowly came to be admitted even in Krishna Yatras, of course occasionally. We shall quote the following, though of a later period, to give our readers an idea of such innovation :—

A new Yatra "Nanda Vidaya," was performed by the "Glee Club" company and was in turn applauded and [illegible]ded by Babu Ram Mukerjee [illegible] inhabitant of Jorasanko had [illegible] the "Half

Akhrai" party of the locality—the first musical association in Calcutta—into a Yatra party and had been both the secretary and the poet to it. In course of the year some four or five thousand of rupees had been spent over the affair and in addition to the bonafide members, the services of two girls—the elder of the two named Sidam being about 12 years old—and of six or seven boys were secured. The time for entertainment extended from 9 in the evening to 7 in the morning." *"The Hindu Intelligence" March, 26, 1849 A. D.*

The Bhaskar also reports about the same facts:—*

"The performers were gorgeously and fitly dressed and Behala, Tobla and Dholok musicians acquitted very admirably. The songs were sweet and melodious and amongst others Titoo Ram Boral played the part of Nando, Rajnarain Chatterjee that of Mantri and Nabin Chandra that of Upānando. The songs of Chhidam took everyone by surprise. All were charmed by her songs."

Nando Vidaya was also performed at the house of Krishna Sinha on the 14th April 1849 in a remodelled way.†

But even then Krishna Yatra did not entirely lose its popularity : the old sentiments yet survived. On the one hand there were Sakher Jatra and theatres and on the other side was the indigenous Yatra of Govinda Adhikary. But it was often found that Govinda always used to command a huge crowd. Govinda, too, as we have seen, had to make some changes according to the taste of the time Thus he had to give up the old method (school) of the Kaliya Daman

FROM AMATEUR TO PROFESSIONAL

Since the amateur Theatre of the rich was short-lived, amateur Yatras came to be run on professional line. Parties from other places also came to Calcutta, held their performances and then went away. We mention below some of those parties :—

"A band of performers from Manipur is now exhibiting in Calcutta who represent the sport of Krishna with the Gopies. The musicians are men, but the singers are women and they are dressed as Krishna, Lalita, Vishakha, Chitra, Ranga Devi, Sudevi, Champaklata, Vidyadhari and Indu Rekha; their flat nosed countenances are rather indifferent representation of the beauty of the Gopies."

"A company of performers under Haladhar is also acting with great success at the house of the Babus. They represent the Yatras of Bidya Sundar, the destruction of Sambhu and Nisumbha and others (*quoted from Samacher Chandrika*) *Asiatic Journal*, (*Apl. 1829, pp. 513*).

In the year 1832—33 Nabin Krishna Bose of Shyam Bazar, tried to found Theatre on the basis of this Vidya Sundar play. That Theatre did not last for more than 3 or 4 years. Therefore Yatra was regarded as the chief source of entertainment.

PYARI MOHAN

Baranagar was then famous for music. Shyama Charan Banerjee who acted the part of Sundar in Nabin Babu's party was a resident of this place. Another good musician was Pyari. Pyari used to beg from door to door by playing on his Violin Pyari was a resident

of Baranagar and he was of handsome appearance. A well-to-do public woman of Bhowanipur having heard his songs, grew enamoured of him. Pyari and that woman lived together for some time and they then formed a Yatra party and performed Nal-Damayanti. The audience was greatly pleased with the performance and in course of time beggar Pyari came to be known as Pyari Mohan. Pyari built a big house and lived there After this other Yatra parties were formed under the leadership of women and performed Vidya Sundar. Of them the party of Tara Hara and that of Bou Master are worthy of special mention. It is said the mistress of Raja Vaidyanath also organised a Vidya Sundar Party with females. The Raja, too, spent much money and was bracketted with Nabin Babu as Kalua-Bhulua :

"Nabin Babu Kalua
Raja Vaidyanath Bhulua."

Ram Krishna Kānsāri was a famous musician of Bhowanipur and used to teach music in Pyari's Yatra party. He was a master in music and dancing and was an expert player on Violin. It is said Nabin Babu appreciated Pyari Mohan's performances very much.

Kansari's "Dakshajajna" Jatra was very popular.

By that time the party of Ramdhan Sutradhar also gained reputation. He used to earn about Rs. 50 to 60 each night by his performance. He had shares with other members. He took one-fourth and the three-fourths were distributed amongst the rest. But whatever presents were made to the party belonged to his share. People called Ramdhan as Ostadji (or master of music) and his fame spread from Ganga Sagar (the junction of the Ganges with the sea) to the Gangetic regions

GOPAL OORAY

In Sakher Yatra none achieved so much success as Gopal Ooray. His fame spread from one end of Bengal to the other. He was invited almost from every quarter. The songs of his Vidya Sundar Pala are still sung in Bengal.

Gopal was born in Jajpur, Cuttack. He came to Calcutta and at first he used to hawk stationery articles in the street Afterwards he joined the Yatra party of Radha Madhab Babu's son, a wealthy resident of Bow Bazar. Gopal had a beautiful appearance and his voice was extremely sweet. He acted the part of Malini. People were simply charmed by his sweet songs and fine acting. Radha Madhab Babu was so much pleased with Gopal's abilities that he at once appointed him on a salary of fifty rupees per month. After the death of Radha Madhab Babu, Gopal got everything belonging to his Yatra party. Then Gopal formed a party of his own.

Gopal got songs composed in simple language by one Bhairab Halder of Singur and got them also set to tune by him. With those songs he charmed his audience. The songs were so composed that they were greatly used for dancing.

Gopal was handsome in appearance, and when he appeared in the role of a woman it was difficult to recognise him as a man.

There was one Kashi, a Chāsādhopā by caste. He had extraordinary proficiency in dancing. He used to teach dancing in many Yatra parties and to many men and women in privata. Kashi joined Gopal's party and appeared in the role of Malini It was a unique com

bination, and everybody was simply charmed by Gopal Ooray's Jatra Kaski Malini's dancing gave rise to *Khemta* in Jatra. Umesh and Bholanath Das used to appear respectively as Vidya and Sundar in Gopal's party

Gopal had wonderful capacity for representing soft and amorous sentiments. We shall cite only one or two instances here. Hirāmālini is the most prominent character in the play of Vidya Sundar. Gopal at first used to appear in that part. When Sundar called Hirāmālini as māshi (mother's sister), Gopal at once changed his voice to that of a harp whose main string had been snapped—

याद्‌ु एमन कथा केन बल्‌लि
भोरेर बेला सुखेर स्वपन एमन समय जागालि ।

"O my darling! Why have you uttered that word?
Why have you broken my sweet dream in the
hours of the morning?"

Describing the beauty of Hiramalini, Gopal said:—

"When I go to supply flowers to the Brāhminpara, the Brahmins engaged in their worship gaze in admiration holding the Koshakushis in their hands रहे कोशाकुशि अमनि धरे ।

He would sing elsewhere as Vidya, the heroine in reference to Hirā Mālini.

ठेड़ा चुले बकुल फुले खोंपा बेंधेछ
प्रेम कि ज्वालिये तुलेछ ।

"Thou hast adorned thy scanty hair
With a wreath of Vakul
Hast thou rekindled the fire of love?

Vidya was to be married to Sundara, then in the gui
of a Sannyasi and Mālini says:—

"The asylum will be a great rendezvous
Of all kinds of travellers
And you will smoke hemp
Crying Vyom Kedār."

Gopal's party was so famous that invitations ca
from all quarters of Bengal.

THE DECLINE OF THE JATRA

In truth, display of amorous sentiments was the e
of the Jatras.

In Krishna Jatra, there was no doubt enough
amorous sentiments, but that could not be shown in t
Vidya Sundar. Vidya Sundar took only such portio
as meeting of Malini with Sundar under the shade
Vakul, Sundar's stoppage in the house of Malini, and
Malini's acting as a go-between between Vidya a
Sundar. In the Vidya Sundar there was no room f
exhibition of pathos, or other sentiments. Whatever lit
pathos it might have, was lost in the profusion of son
and dances. Even in hours of deep sorrow, Vidya hers
would sing and dance and the audience would clap th
hands in joy, and with great ardour, as soon as Vid
would commence her dance. Thus pathos, if any, w
turned into laughter in Vidya Sundar.

From the point of good taste and decency, too, Vid
Sundar became highly objectionable. It could not
enjoyed both by the ather and the son sitting togeth
The songs were mostly lewd and very often betrayed
[illegible]

Bankim Chandra seeing people enjoying such objectionable things wrote in his 'Bangadarshan' :—

"In the Jatras of modern time we notice a reigning influence of Vidya, Malini and Sundara. What kind of lesson the young girls of the village get when they hear such songs from the lips of Vidya ?.—

'Now, find out some means to get my man
Who has kindled fire of lust कामानल in me
But himself is indifferent.
When that auspicious day will arrive
When the moon will rise
And will pour forth nectar
To save the life of this chātaki ?'

"Does not a father feel ashamed to hear such things with his son and daughter ? What will they think of their parents when they grow old ?"

Banga Darshan 1279 B. S. (Paush).

Indecent and low tastes first caused a feeling of repulsion in the minds of the cultured people towards the Jatras, and then with the spread of education, people grew fond of new pastimes and recreations. That is why the rich and the poor alike became fond of "Theatre." From this time dates the downfall of the Jatras, and it could not be averted. Then a new kind of Jatra came into existence under the name of the 'Opera.' Some men used to laugh at them calling them Apāyā or 'inauspicious'. Operas are still performed in many places In an Opera there is a variety of dress and costumes elegant language and other imposing things.

Opera there is much to see and consequently there is dearth of songs and poetry.

The "Hindu Patriot" gives some idea of it :—

"We acknowledged in our last issue the receipt of Sakuntala by Babu Benode Prosad Banerjee. This is the first opera in Bengalee. It has been written in simple and elegant style and interest is well-sustained throughout. The songs are appropriate and more than once we must say, it did credit to those who were engaged in it. We hope the opera will supersede the degenerate jatra."—*H. P. May, 22, 1865.*

Again we find in the issue of November, 20, 1865—"On 14th Nov. there was a performance at Dutts' house Bowbazar. The opera was preceded by a play on the Pianoforte by the trained but gentle hands of Mrs. Berigny. At about one in the morning commenced the opera. The concert which inaugurated the performance was excellent; in fact it reminded us of the Belgachhia Orchestra. Then began the play; the actors acquitted themselves on the whole successfully and creditably. This we can boldly and sincerely say that of the three dramas which have been popularised in the form of opera, the performance of Padmabati was decidedly the best and the most successful."

Thus, the Jatras improved in imitation of theatre, but they began to lose their hold slowly upon the public mind. At last, the distinction between the theatre and the Jatra began to disappear day by day and Yatras began to merge into theatre.

Jatras moreover had a great drawback · the existence of some called Jun who would often tax the

patience of the audience by their learned techniques in music, and that too often after a short speech. We have cited some instances from the 'Bangadarsan' about it.

After this, a play-wright gave up writing for Yatra, but began to write drama. Though the influence of Yatra is evident in many subsequent Bengali dramas, still it cannot be denied that most people lost their enthusiasm for Yatra. Who can prevent the changes brought by time?

This is what Pandit Ram Narayan Tarkaratna dealt with about Yatra in 1857 A.D. at the time of writing his drama Ratnabali :—

"Every one who has been acquainted with the incomparable beauty and wealth of English and Sanskrit Dramas, has grown disgusted with despicable Jatras."

TASTES IN JATRA

Like Pandit Ramanarain, other well-known writers of that time also wanted the revival of the Bengali Theatre. Dr. Rajendralal wished that "Jatras should take the form of the original Indian dramas."* The poet Iswar Chandra Gupta was also of opinion that inspite of some entertainment derived from the performances of Kaliya-Daman, Vidyasundar and Nala-Damayanti, these were performed in so detestable ways, that they could satisty only the pleasure-loving people of low tastes, but could not satisfy the refined tastes of the respectable section.†

Under the caption "The Bengali drama," an Anglo-

---

* Bibidhartha Sangraha, Magh 1783, Shak p. 235

† Probhakar 8th June 1848.

Indian journalist with his enlightened ideas of theatrical amusements wrote very harshly on the Jatra performance then in vogue in Bengal :—

"India in her high and palmy state had also a dramatic literature of her own and scenic representations to gratify the people. ... We shall proceed to make a remark or two on the state of the drama as it now exists among the Bengalis. Of the representations called Jatras we dare not give here a detailed description. They are wretched from the commencement to the Fifth Act. The plots are very often the amours of Krishna, or the love of Vidya and Sundar. In the representation of Krishna-jatras, boys arrayed in the habits of Sakhies and Gopinis (milk-maids) cut the principal figures on the stage. It would require the pencil of a master-painter to portray these fairies of the Bengali stage. Their sooty complexion, their coal black cheeks, their haggard eyes, their long extended arms, their gaping mouths and their puerile attire excite disgust. Their external deformity is rivalled by their discordant voices, for the screechings of the night-owls, the howlings of the jackals and the barking of the dogs that bay the moon are harmony itself compared with their horrid yells. Their dances are in strict accordance with the other accessories. In the evolutions of the hands and feet dignified with the name of dancing, they imitate all posture and gestures calculated to soil the mind and

> pollute the fancy. The principal actor during the interludes is a 'methar' who enters the stage with a broomstick in his hand and cracks a few stupid jests which set the audience in a roar of laughter and his brother Bhulua who is completely fuddled amuses the spectators with the false steps of his feet."

But observations of Anglo-Indian journals were seldom sympathetic towards our national institutions. Girish Chandra Ghose, the founder of the "National stage" has however, given a true picture of the loss and gain at the decline of the "Jatra" .—

"Before the rise of the theatre. Kavi, Half-ākrāi, Panchali and Yatra were prized by men. Half-akrāi, Kavi and Panchali allowed vulgar and filthy abuses and people were greatly amused with those slangs. There was little conversation in the Jatra. After a few words, the song would begin, when an actor would suggest "and then explain the thing clearly." This song was no doubt some-what appreciated, but clowns and jesters were more appreciated. The clowns used to sing in light tunes and their songs were more relished than the difficult tunes of the main theme. Clowns used to abuse, and that amused the people greatly. Abuses and vituperation were so much liked by the people that editors of news-papers often indulged in filthy abuses. Those papers that could excel in abusing used to command a large number of subscribers. Those who were adept in the use of vituperative language were most honoured! Whatever might be said against English education, it was English

* Review 1851 The Bengali Drama, Vol. XV

educated persons who first saw that such a taste was not good for society. Thereupon, prominent persons began to take part in dramatic representations. Since then the drama came to be appreciated."*

Though a Jatra could not boast of high dramatic art, but then it must be frankly admitted that with its disappearance the country lost a valuable asset. Let us quote Girish Chandra's views :—

> "Vulgar and obscene slangs disappeared with the disappearance of the Jatras, but along with it the sweet songs of Vadan Adhikary, and Govinda Adhikary were also gone for good. The sweet songs of deep emotion of the old Krishna Lila disappeared from the country. People then lost their originality and took to imitation".

Govinda Adhikary, Narayan Das, Nilkantha Mukherje, Rasik Chakravarty and others were men with feelings and thought. They had also faith in their religion. So they could charm their audience simply by their sweet songs and speeches without any assistance of scene or dress.

THE FUSION OF JATRA AND THEATRE

But it won't be in any way an exaggeration that in Girish Chandra the old Yatra and the new theatre combined to produce a marvellous effect. His first dramatic productions, "Ravan Vadha", "Sitar Viraha" and such other plays are evidence of this fusion of the old with the new. As he adopted this method his first dramas and

* *Vide* Girish

actings were appreciated by all. In course of time, his mythical dramas of the later period captured the imagination of the audience with deep thoughts and noble sentiments and turned out to be first class dramas.

JATRA IN EAST BENGAL

When Calcutta and its adjacent places were full of erotic songs and sentiments of "Vidya Sundara," East Bengal was then resounding with the sweet notes of Krishna Lila. Kalachand Pal, a resident of Vikrampur, district Dacca, became greatly famous for his devotional Krishna Jatra. In Dacca, there was no dearth of Jatra or Kavi, but we shall briefly mention here the great enthusiasm that was roused by three devotional pieces named "Swapna Vilash," "Vichitra Vilash" and "Rai Unmadini." 'Swapna Bilas" (Dream pleasure) was written about 1835. Several Jatra parties performed it, and the book was sold like hot cakes. In the preface to the second piece "Bichitra Bilas" (The Amour Wonderful) Krishna Kamal wrote about 'Swapnabilas' as follows: "The public surely liked the work, otherwise why should there be a sale of 20,000, copies in so short a period." Latterly Dr. Nishikanta Chattopadhaya of Dacca took these pieces with him to Berlin, St. Petersburg and other places, and wrote a beautiful book named, "The Popular Dramas of Bengal," based upon these three books. Dr. Chatterjee however has not mentioned the name of any other Jatra in his book excepting these three pieces of East Bengal.

In an excellent article in "Bangadarshan" (1287 B.S.) Pandit Haraprosad Sastri wrote about the Doctor eulogizing his article published in Bengali in the journal 'Bharati'

different countries, but shall write in Bengali. Dr. Nishi Kanta's article is an instance in point. His letter is written in Bengali and his heart weeps for Bengal. He cries for Bengal from the far-off St. Petersburg."

"KRISHNA KAMAL"

Krishna Kamal Goswami, the author of these three pieces, though a native of Bhajan Ghat in Nadia, captured the heart of East Bengal during his stay at Dacca. Besides these three books, he also compiled "Bharat Milan," "Nandaharan" and "Suval Samvād". After finishing his studies he composed "Nemai Sannyasa" and himself appeared in the role of Nemai. People were so much moved by his acting that they began to shed tears in deep emotion. He was born in 1810 and died at the age of 78 on the banks of the Ganges. East Bengal people called him Barā Gosāi. Krishna Kamal's thought was deep and his style was charming. So every one was delighted by his songs and sweet composition. We shall give one or two specimens.

Rādhika is mad for Sri Krishna, she runs towards the grove in quest of Krishna. Lalita, her maid, asks her to walk slowly.

"Don't you go in that manner
There are thorns in the way
That will injure your feet."

Radhika answers that it was for her good that she has obtained the love of Sri Krishna. She would accustom herself to thorns and briars. She said :

"If the night were dark
I would have thorns on the ground
And would roll over them "

Elsewhere Radha seeing the clouds chased by the wind thinks that her Shyām is running away at her sight :

"O my sister! Catch hold of that cruel
lover quick,
Clad in yellow robe.
Having come near, instead of removing my
sorrow,
Has enhanced it doubly.
Having fallen in love with a libertine
I knock about hither and thither
With ceaseless tears in my eyes."

Again at the sight of the clouds, Radha describes the beauty of Sri Krishna :

"How beautiful, how green!"

In fact, in "Rai Unmadini" (Radha—mad in love) the divine madness (transport) of Chaitanya Deva has been reflected. Having taken sentiments from Chandidas, Vidyapati, Krishnadas Kaviraj, Rup, Ramananda Rao and other famous Vaishnava poets and also from famous Jatrawalas such as Badan and Govinda Adhikary, Ram Basu, Haru Thakur and other masters of Kavi and by fusing his own poetry Krishna Kamal Goswami created these three sweet pieces.

But in East Bengal too people, in course of time, became fond of new innovations and changes and thus grew tired of purān (old) Jatras as these were called. The theatre now began to spread its influence and new Jatras after the fashion of theatrical exhibitions were more liked.

Besides the aforesaid Jatrawalas, there were a few others whose names are worth mentioning such as Ananda Adhikary and Joychand Adhikary in Ram Jatra, Guru

Prosad Vallabha of Chandannagore (Farasdanga) in Chandi Jatra, Lav Sen Baral of Burdwan in Manashār Bhāsān Jatra. Every country-house of persons of position had a Chandimandapa and dances were given there in honour of Chandi (Fortune) and other deities. Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen correctly states a view lately accepted as authoritative by Sir William Ridgeway that "Bengali Mongala Gāns which grew into melodramas began as short odes in praise of Manasha Devi, Mongal Chandi and other local deities. The Jatras are a mixture of these songs, becoming more dramatic in form along with prose dialogues introduced. The chief place for performances was often a Chandi-mandap or courtyard facing the temple." *Cal. Review. 1923, p. 201.*

The Jatrawallas mentioned above all acquired great reputation in their localities by their respective themes— *Bharati, 1288 B.S., Magh.*

Nilkanta Mukherjee and Narain Das enchanted many by their Yatra performances Nilkanta had a great reputation in all the districts of West Bengal.

When all these Yatras died away, famous Yatrawala Motilal Roy kept the reputation of Yatras intact for a long time.

MATI ROY

Yatras and Kathakatas are some of the commendable means for mass education. Those who keep such cheap and delightful means of mass education alive among the people deserve our grateful thanks. Motilal Roy's name therefore deserves special mention in this case.*

* Though chronologically we should have mentioned Mati Ray afterwards, but in the enumeration of Jatras his name comes prominently.

Matilal Roy was born in February, 1843 in an humble village named Bhatshala in the District of Burdwan. For sometime he worked as a clerk and then as a school master and sometimes used to write poems in the 'Prabhakar' of poet Iswar Gupta.

In 1871 Harinarayan Chowdhuri of Dogachhia requested Matilal to write a book for a Yatra performance. Thereupon Matilal first composed Tarani Sen Vadhan and afterwards 'Ram Vana Vāsh' from Kirttivasha Ramayana in Bengali. Matilal began to earn a lot and acquired great reputation by holding Yatra performance with Hari Narayan. Every one was greatly delighted by those shows. People said they had never seen or heard such excellent things before. Matilal's subject was old. but his methods were new. Matilal in course of time composed many plays, such as Kaliyadaman, Bharat Milan, Mahalila, Sitaharan, Draupadir Vastra Haran, Vijoya Chandi, Pandava Nirvashan, Nemai Sannyasa, Bhisma's Sharashajjyā, Ram Raja, Karna Vadha, Lakhsman Varjan. Vrajalila, Ram Vanavash, Rāvan Vadha, Gayasurer Haripadpadma Labh and other pieces.

JATRA IN IMITATION OE THEATRE

Under Matilal's influence, Krishna Lila Yatra came to be known as 'Puratan' old. Vidyasundar was discarded for being indecent and Matilal's Yatra attracted every body's mind.

Theatre by that time had come into vogue in the country. Acting and dress in Jatra in imitation of theatrical performances greatly attracted the public. This is why Matilal's Yatra became so popular. Matilal gave up many old practices of Yatra and adopted new methods.

Matilal was not only an innovator but he was an educated and a highly accomplished man.

This is what has been recorded about Matilal by the author of the Bangabhāsā-Lekhok :—

"In 1280 B.S. (1873 A.D.) when Matilal formed a Yatra party in Nadia (Navadwipa) he held first performance in the compound of Pora Mātā the presiding deity of Navadwipa after paying due homage to the aforesaid goddess.

"The Pandits of Navadwipa were highly pleased with his performance and gave him the title of Kaviratna and also presented him a gold medal.

"Matilal also gave a performance in the palace of Krishnanagar Raj on the occasion of Dol. At that time the Raja of Krishnanagar was Khitish Chandra. During the performance the Raja said to Matilal, "you have broken the practice (vow) of my ancestors, for before this no Yatra has yet been performed within this house. But, I am sure, if such Yatra was then in existence there would have been a breach long before.

"The late Keshub Chandra Sen heard Mati Roy's Yatra with great eagerness in his house, "Kamal Kutir". On one occasion we have ourselves witnessed Keshub Chandra Sen with Ram Krishna Paramhansa listening with rapt attention Mati Roy's Yatra in his house. On that occasion, Roy Mahashaya was performing Nemai Sannayasa, himself appearing in the role of Sridhar.

"Paramhansa Ramkrishna Deva was lost in a trance seeing his highly emotional acting. When the trance was broken, Paramhansa Deva stood up crying "Mati. Mati" and Roy in great delight Sir Surendra Nath

Banerjee (then Babu) the great orator applauded Mati Roy greatly, hearing his words on social education and reforms in his house at Simul Tala."

Many parties were formed both in East and West Bengal in imitation of Mati Roy. Of these the parties of Sāntrā Company, Dengar Ghosh, Umakanta Ghosal, Ahibhusan Bhattacherjee,* and of the Nars were famous. Umakanta Babu belonged to the Brahmin caste ; he was educated and had a sweet and sonorous voice and therefore he could soon make a name in East Bengal. Bhusan Das's party and that of Mathur Shaha may be named in this connection. There were many others and some of them well-known but we do not like to give an exhaustive list as being unnecessary from the historical point of view. From national point of view Mukunda Das of the present day is known to all. He himself sings songs on socio-political topics in a stirring way and this is the chief attraction of his Jatra.

We shall next discuss about Kabi, Half-Akrai, Kathakatā ect., which were introduced as substitutes for performances on the stage.

KABI

Though Kabi was not like the Yatras but as an item of amusement it should be mentioned here. The Kavi is sung between two parties, and there are wit-combats between the two parties relating to Sakti, Siva, Krishna and other mythical topics. One party sings after the conclusion of the other. Towards the last part of the Eighteenth Century Haru Thakur, his disciples Bhola



* His 'Surath-uddhwar" was worth seeing

Moyra, Nilu Thakur, Netai Vaishnava and others became quite famous. Towards the first half of the Nineteenth Century Haru Thakur, Ram Basu, Antony Feringi, Bhola Moyra, Sadu Roy and others were greatly popular. Haru Thakur was a great poet of Raja Naba Kissen well-known as Colonel Clive's munshi. Gradually Haru Thakur became one of the courtiers of Raja Naba Kissen and often acted as an arbitrator and judge between the two rival parties of song. The famous song of Haru Thakur was .—

"O my tongue ! Do not be lazy in taking
  Hari's name.
What is destined will happen.
What ! will sink the boat
Seeing the swelling waves of the
  sea-like world ?"

Haru Thakur's songs were very fine. He acquired great reputation in songs of absent love (विरह).

The most fascinating Kabi-walla was Antony-Feringee. Antony was a Portugese, his house still stands in Chandan Nagar. Antony fell in love with a young Brahmin woman and settled with her at Gariti. The woman, however, kept her Hindu faith upto the last and used to celebrate Durga Puja and other Hindu festivities.

ANTONY FERINGEE

Antony learned excellent Bengali. Having fallen in love, Antony lost his vocation, next all his property by forming an party but after forming a professional

party of a Kabi after bitter experience, he succeeded in earning a lot of money.

The above-mentioned Kabiwallas were fast-composers of rhymed couplets and their songs became quite lively when they got Antony as their rival. We shall mention here some instances of it. On one occasion Ram Basu said to Antony :—

'Tell me, O Antony !
I want to hear that to-day
Having come to this country
Why have you taken this dress
And why there is no black coat on your person"?

At that time Ram Basu belonged to Thakur Sinha's party.

Antony replied :—

"I am quite comfortable in the Bengali dress
And being the son-in-law of the father of
 Thakur Singhi
Have given up black coat".

Antony once sang in Nawadwip :—

"O mother Matangi !
I know not worship or prayer
I am a Feringi by caste".

Antony's rival immediately replied on behalf of Matangi :—

"Go and worship thy Jesus in the Serampur
 Church
Thou art a redoubtable Feringi
It won't be possible to save thee

On another occasion Ram Basu said :—

"O, Saheb ! In vain you have bowed your head
to Krishna's

If your clergy hears this
Will punish you by marking your cheeks with*
lime and so

Antony replied :—

"Hear me brother !
There is no difference between Christ and Krish
The only difference is name
That have misled the people so long.
My God is Hari of the Hindus
Look there stands Shyam
And my life will be blessed if I get His red feet

Of the Kabi-Wālās none was so prompt in repar
as Antony Feringi.

On one occasion when Haru Thakur decided aga
Ram Basu's party, Ram Basu sang out mortified at
partial treatment :—

"Thou Brahmin ! Thou won't live long
Worms have eaten away your Chakra †
And your streak of gold is dim."

JOHN HALHED

There was another European gentleman Mr. Natha
John Halhed who used to go out as a Bengali
Antony and freely talk with the Bengalis without b

* To put soot on one's cheek and lime on the other is a sign of dis
now of obsolete.

† Chakra refers to granite symbol of Narayana.

detected. On one occasion while at Burdwan having been solicited to give some proof of his knowledge of the language, he embraced the opportunity of a public show given by the Raja to the Europeans and insinuating himself as a "Native singer" performed his part so admirably by joining them in their chants that even they were unable to perceive that a stranger was among them.

"Friend of India". The 9th August 1838.

Mr. Halhed, however, was not a professional singer, but a judge of the Sadar Dewani A'dalot! Dr. Carey used to call him the first Englishman who learnt colloquial Bengali language without a rival! *Ibid.*

NETAI DAS

Netai Das was a famous Kabiwala Poet Iswar Gupta gave a long article about him in his famous organ "Sambad Probhakar" .—

"Every rich man when he wanted to have any Kabi on the occasion of any festivity engaged Netai Das first. There was great wit-combat between him and Bhavani Benia. Hence the common expression is the duel of Netee Baishnava. People used to come to hear from a distance of one or two days' journey. The house where his performance was held was crammed to its utmost and it was a job to make way through that dense crowd. Though there were several Kabi parties at that time, those of Hari Thakur, Netai Das and Bhavani Banik were most famous. Netai had a great following. The residents of Kumar Hatta, Bhat Para, Triveni, Bally, Chandan Nagar (Farash Danga), Chinsura and other places, both high and low were all in admiration when they heard Netai's

name uttered before them. They seemed to be overjo when Netai came out victorious and their regrets kr no bounds when Netai was defeated by his rival, tl thought as if they would lose everything by his det Many even gave up their food and sleep In the beg ning there were even quarrels and fighting between adherents of two parties.

What to speak of others, the Brahmins of Bhāt P called Netai Das Nityananda Prabhu (Lord Gourang colleague).

When he stood up to sing, his admirers cried out " Master is on his legs." Netai had one special gift, could amuse both the high and the low."

We may here quote from "Ekal and Sekal" of R narayan Bose :—"Kavi Yatra, Panchali and similar ot things were the chief sources of entertainment to people, and of these Kavi was the foremost. The poe and songs of Haru Thakur, Netai Vaishnava, Narsi Ram Basu and Bhavani Benia were appreciated and pri everywhere."

(*Ekal and Sekal p. 1*

He who could compose rhymes fast was cal "Vadhandar." If the Vadhandar was prompt and acquainted with Pauranic Legends, then defeat of the ri party was sure. The Kabis of that time were gr Pandits. Poet Iswar Chandra Gupta some time acted a Vadhandar in a Kabi party.

Kabis were appreciated both in towns and Muffasil.

In of time, however these wit-cmbats degr into low t and filthy vituperations between t

rival parties, calling for the one-sided remarks of an Anglo-Indian Journal :—

"The animus of the Kavis is rivalry. Two bands under different leaders are with each other in winning the applause of the audience. Their songs, in the first instance celebrate the loves of Krishna and Radha, or the praises of the bloody Goddess Kali. But these over, they indulge in the songs of the most wanton licentiousness and to crown the whole with calling each other bad names. So far for the matter ; the manner of singing is one of which young Bengal may well be ashamed. The houses of some of the rich Babus of Calcutta are annually the scenes of these disgraceful exhibitions, others have got heartily tired of them but have substituted the less barbarous but not the less immoral 'nautches'. But the Kavis are in high repute in the moffasil and women from behind the screens may be observed greedily devouring their licentious effusions. The Jhumurs or bands of female Kaviwallas are nearly extinct."

Calcutta Review Vol. XV. 1851.

ENTERTAINING EUROPEANS

Nautches were much in vogue at that time and wealthy people used to entertain the Europeans generally with Nautch parties, or dances by professional Baijis. We may quote some instances of these entertainments for the information of our readers :—

"For several nights, Bowany Churan, the second son of the late Radhamohan Banerjee has entertained the whole of the European inhabitants of Salkia and Howrah, with nautches at his house at both these places, in cele-

bration of the birth of a first-born son. The dancing girls, as might be expected, were the best on the occasion the town could afford"—*Asiatic Journal—Nov. 1816, Pp. 519-520.*

"At the old and hospitable mansion of Rajah Rajkrishna, a new and equally pleasing exhibition came in to relieve the tameness of the regular nautch. A number of male dancers of the Mohamedan creed, performed a farcical scene, termed "Buhar" in which the awkward and mincing steps of the Hindustan dance were extremely 'barlesqued', and the wild, impassioned strains of the Kheal, Tappa and Dhrupad ....were ludicrously parodied."—*A. J. July 1816, Page 36.*

HALF AKHRĀI

Half-Akhrais were amateur parties in which youngmen belonging to respectable families took part. There was variety of musical instruments in them and Half-Akhrais were in vogue only in towns. In Calcutta many of the old aristocratic families including Rajah and Maharajas took part in the Half-Akhrais. The Calcutta Review* speaks of it.—

"During the Durga Puja celebrations bands of Half Akhrai and Panchali singers may be seen marching through the streets of Calcutta with their flags hoisted singing loud poems of victory."

PANCHALI

"Panchali" is of another type. The chief musician of the Panchali party, by way of narration, used to sing

* Cal. Review Vol XV 1851 The Bengali Drama

some incidents of the Kurukshetra war, of the Radha Krishna's love and others of his party sang the chorus with him. Though Lakshmi Kanta Biswas, Ganga Narayan Naskar and other Pānchāliwalas were very popular, Dāsarathi eclipsed them all and was known as an eminent poet and devotee.

Dasarathi Roy was born in 1804 at Valmoro village in the District of Burdwan and he was alive till 1857. Dasarathi was at first a Vādhandar in a Kavi party and was abused in filthy language by that of the rival party. At this, his father and maternal uncle asked him not to go any more to the Kavi party. Thereafter Dasarathi Roy left an imperishable glory by writing Panchali in Bengali. Many of his writings, such as Probhash, Chandi. Daksha-Jajna, Mān Bhanjan, Lab-Kusher Juddha, Vidhoba Bibaha (widow marriage) and others have already been printed.

In 1857, about the time when Dasarathi breathed his last. Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar stirred up the whole country by bringing forward his humanitarian proposal for the Widow-re-marriage Act. Before his death Dasarathi composed a song in which he censured Vidya Sagar in the garb of praise and praised Iswar Chandra Gupta in the guise of abuse :—

"In order to give a lover to the widow
Highly accomplished Vidya Sagar an ocean of virtue
and learning...... ...."

The other song ran thus :—

"Let all the impious people of the land die
They have conspired together against the widows
In the house of our Iswar Gupta in Calcutta

Strange ! He does not understand the wailing of
widow being a Baidya
As a bad physician kills a patient by
administering poison."

His other songs are famous as :—

"Āmi dosh kāre divo
Āmi swakhāda salile dube mari Shyāmā."
"I have none to blame, but I am drowned
In the ditch dug by my own hands
My six passions are like bows in the sacred field
of battle. ....

Dasarathi was unequalled in alliteration, simili
witty repartees and even in putting his rivals into
comfiture.

Even the "*Calcutta Review*"* speaks of him :—"
are many Panchali versifiers now living but the pa
superiority is certainly due to Dasarathi Roy—
poems already amount to several volumes."

Bankim Chandra, too, has spoken highly of
Dasharathi occupies a position in Bengali litera
However, Panchali was associated with so much redu
things and sometimes they were so low and indecent
cultured people soon grew disgusted with them.

The name of Brojomohan Roy as perform
Panchali and a Jatra singer is very important. His
Sita, Sabitri, Abhimannyu were specially interesting.

The purpose of mass-education can be serve
Kathakata by which one narrates with interesting epi
and comments, some legends of the Puran, intersp

* Vol. XV 1851 "the Bengali Drama.

with songs and witticisms. Of the Kathakas the name of Sridhar Kathak is most famous. Kathakata is free from all sorts of vulgarity and indecency. It is still in vogue but able Kathakas are very rare now-a-days.

Nidhu Babu's Tappa is specially worth-mentioning.

KIRTAN.

Another form of musical entertainment had been in vogue in Bengal for a long time. This is what is known at present as kirtan. This term means devotional music. Kirtan was confined in former days to extolling the attributes—the love, kindness and forgiveness—of God.*

All musical instruments which are calculated to awaken sensuous feelings, like tabla, violin. serangi, etc. were excluded from kirtan. It was sung to the accompaniment of ek-tārā, Sarinda (of the bairāgis), khol, khanjani or gopijantra. This form of song was at first confined to female singers—a class of demimonde who gave up their unclean life, sometimes for the sake of art, sometimes out of devotion, but more often out of ennui at the monotone of their lives.

But in course of time kirtan underwent many changes. Finding that it is very pleasant and dignified form of entertainment, many male artists took it up and became adepts in the art. Instead of confining itself to extolling the beneficence of the gods, it took up for its theme the immortal love of the divine consorts—Radha and Krishna—in all its phases—पूर्वराग, मिलन, विरह and so on. Then again, the Ektara and Sarinda had to give

*Also वैराग्य the vanity of human desires, and the imper e of mundane things

place to the ubiquitous harmonium but the veteran khol retained its place. Even in theatres, when a kirtan is sung, khol is played instead of tabla or pakhoāj (mridanga).

The charm of kirtan lies in using suitable उपजs and the singer who can use the largest number of suitable उपजs on the spur of the moment, easily makes his mark in the world of kirtan. To illustrate what has been said above, we give the following example. One line of the song that was being sung was—विथले पड़ल ऐछे माल्तीर माला।

Then comes the following उपजs in serial order, thus—

आमार माला गाँथा विफल हल।

बन्धुर जन्ये माला गेथेछिलाम, आमार माला गाथा—

बन्धुर जन्ये, अनुराग मिशिये, माला गेथेछिलाम, आमार माल्या गाँथा—and so on.

It is perhaps not generally known that Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan Das very much appreciated this form of music and believed that it would be a powerful instrument of mass education if improved in certain respects and handled properly. During his life time he tried his best to improve kirtan music and adapt it to the modern conditions. He used very much to appreciate Gonesh Kirtonia for his elevated ways of singing Mahājoni padas.

After his death, his talented daughter Srimati Aparna Devi has taken the matter up in right earnest and in order to give this form of music an impetus which is its due, has started a kirtan party of her own, called ब्रजमाधुर्य संघ। Her party has already given several performances before ed gatherings with great success On an

occasion we were present, the present Maharajah of Natore played khol in accompaniment. Everywhere the sweet melody and the extreme devotional nature of the songs of herself and her party have been highly appreciated and extolled by all classes of society from High Court Judges to the common men. We wish this organisation long life and continued support so that it can perform its work of public education for which it has been inaugurated.

Rai Bahadoor Khagendra Nath Mitra M.A., who has made a distinct mark in kirtan songs of the present day has conferred the title of कीर्त्तन स्वरस्वती on Mrs. Aparna Devi—which she rightly deserves. She is a revivalist and is after all working in the line chalked out by her father —Late Chittaranjan Das.

CHAPTER VIII

BENGALI DRAMA IN NEPAL

During the Moslem rule the above mentioned Jatra. Kabi etc. in short, were the sources of public entertainment and national amusements in Bengal while drama was driven to the neighbouring provinces. We have given an account of drama in Orissa and we shall now state how drama flourished in Nepal, Mithila, Assam and Orissa. Though under the Mahomedan rule, drama lost its importance in India and consequently in Bengal, but in localities outside the influence of the Moslems, drama was in great favour with the people Dramas that were composed in Orissa under the influence of Lord Gouranga though written in Sanskrit yet give an unmistakable evidence of the dramatic genius of Bengal. Again some Bengali dramas have recently been discovered in Nepal in 1915. Though the language of the drama is Bengali but they are written in Nepali character. Babu Nani Lall Banerjee is entitled to our grateful thanks for transcribing them in Bengali characters. Nani Babu's preface to these dramas is both interesting and learned and we can gather many things from it.

We shall quote a few things from his treatise.

The following dramas have been found in Nepal :—

1. Kashi Nath's—Vidya Vilap (pertaining to Vidya **Sundar**)

2. Krishna Deva's—Mahabharat.
3. Ganesh's—Ram Charitra.
4. Dhanapati's—Kam Kanda Kala.

These dramas prove that the Bengalees tried to spread their culture, art and language in Nepal as they now do in different parts of the world.

About 130 years after the arrival of the Mahomedans in India, in 1324 A. D, Hari Sinha Deva, the ruler of Mithila for fear of foreign subjection fled to Nepal and conquered the territory Many Bengalee and Maithili Pandits accompanied Hari Sinha—patron of learning and a strong pillar of Hinduism. A princess of his line named Rajaballa Devi was married to Joysthiti Mall of the old Malla line of Nepal, and Joysthiti afterward ascended the throne of Nepal. After Joysthiti ruled Viswa Malla. and after him the following kings ascended the throne in succession :—

1. Trailakya Malla , 2. Jayay Malla ; 3. Jagat Jyoti Malla ; 4. Jagat Prakash Malla ; 5. Jitamitra Malla ; Bhupatindra Malla ; 7. Ranjit Malla.

The aforesaid four dramas were written in the time of Bhupati Chandra Malla and Ranjit Malla.

These Malla rulers were educated and were great patrons of learning ; and art and literature greatly flourished during their rule In 1768 Nepal was occupied by the Goraknali from Ranjit, the last of the Malla rulers. The Malla rulers tried to spread culture and art of Bengal and Mithila in Nepal and thereby to civilise the country. Joysthiti brought five learned Pandits from Bengal and another five from Mithila and with their help he tried to establish a social order in Nepal

These four books are written in dramatic form, but dramatic art does not appear to have reached much perfection there. One or two characters appear in a scene and leave the stage after singing a song, or after a short conversation. Every song ends with composer's name, and the name is either that of Ranjit Malla or his father Bhupatindra Malla, such as :—

"Let us enter the stage
With beauty love
And sport in amorous dalliance
Thus says heroic Bhupatindra
Ho, Ho !'

In the first mentioned drama there are seven acts, but no scene Vidya, Sundar and Malini are the main characters in it. Nandi, Sutradhar, Nati and such other things in all the four dramas are after Sanskrit dramas. Each one of the dramas has abundance of songs, a song follows almost after a sentence or two. Nāndi is in Sanskrit, likewise the speech of the Sutradhar. After a description of the king and the country, the actor enters the stage and discloses his identity.

The second drama "Mahabharat" consists of 21 acts. First there is Nandi, the true description of the ruler, then of the country and then enters Dhritarāstra The whole incidents of the Mahabharat have been presented in three acts. Draupadi's Sayamvara, Rajsua Jajna, the great battle and lamentātions etc. have all been described in the drama. We shall quote a few instances of it. After the Rajsuya Sacrifice Durjodhan being insulted at every step speaks of his sorrow to his maternal

हमे बड पावल लाज मातुल
हसलु वृकोदर चल दर धाय
शरण गेल तुअ करब उपाय

....

"I have been put to great shame, O maternal uncle!
Brikodara (Bheema) laughed at me.
I seek your help, please do the needful."

"Hear me O uncle, I was put to shame in the richly adorned hall, where in a tank I drenched my dress thinking it a marble stone. This sorrow wrings my heart."

At the time of battle, two persons appear on the stage and after exchanging a few hot words go away. At the end Dhritarastra laments :—

"Where my hundred sons have gone thus leaving me behind
My life is useless
In vain it lingers on earth.
Who knew that such sorrow was in store for my old age
Who will but Hari save me.
Victory be unto Bhupatindra, the king."

बुढ वयसे हमे पावल शोक
हरि हरि के करत त्राण
कर लिखन फल दुर नाहि जाय
जय भूपतीन्द्र नृपभाण

The third play, the Ramayana, is divided into three parts. In the first part Vishnu, Dasaratha, Lomapada, Ravan, Janak. Srutakirti, Vishwamitra, Dattātreya, Vali, Tara, Durvasha and Kalnemi all appear and have

their own say viz :—Ravan says, "I have ten heads. who is a hero like me ? Everyone flies from me."

रावण—

दशमुखवीर आमि कलित कुवेश
अमाक (र) समान वीर आर केवा आच्छे
भरते पलाया याय न आइसे काच्छे ।

Seshnāg says, "My name is Sesh, thus says Raja Ranjit." In the second part, Bibhisan, Bharat and others likewise speak about themselves.

In the third part Ravan says ;
"I shall fight with Ram,
No enemy can stand my presence, and shall
destroy him."

करिवो रण अवे रामेर काछे गिया
आमार संमुखे वैरि के थाकिते पारे
रिपुगण देखिया मारिवो तारे ।

Then Ram says,

"Let us repair to Ayodhya
We shall meet there all in joy
And there shall judge everything then."

चलो अरे अविलम्बे अयोध्यानगरे
आनन्दे करिवो आमि सकले मिलावो
सेखाने करिवो गिया विचार करिवो ।

Madhavanni Kam Kanda Kala is a drama in seven acts but it is written in mixed language consisting of Bengali, Hindi, Maithili blended together.

Of these four dramas, in the Ram Charitra, there is
of Bengali. Erotic sentiments have now

and then been expressed in Ramayana sometimes tending to indecency as in—

सुवदनि शुनो वाणी करिबो चुम्बने
देखिया मुखेर शोभा चंचल हैलो मने
मान छाडिया देब रस दान '

"—Hear me O beauty, my mind has grown restless seeing the beauty of thy face which I long to kiss. Give up thy sullen mood and give me thy love."

In other plays there is often an admixture of Hindi with Bengali.

Srijukta Probodh Chandra Bagchi (M.A. PH.D.) has recently contributed a learned article on Nepali drama in the Sahitya Parishad Patrika and we have got considerable assistance from that article. Probodh Babu says that Joysthiti was greatly fond of drama and after his marriage with Rajabala Devi, a sanskrit drama named Bhairavananda written by Manika was performed. Dramatist Manika was a resident of Mithila. In the festivity held at the birth of Joysthiti's son, the Ramayan was performed.

Kavi Sekhar-Acharya Joytidhiswar a contemporary of Hari Sinha Deva wrote a drama named "Dhurta Samagām" and composed a treatise on dramaturgy named "Varnan Ratnakar." These two authors were contemporaries of Chandi Das and Vidyapati."

At the time of Sri Chaitanya's rise in 1496 A.D. Raja Joyram Malla composed a drama named "Pandava Vijoy" or "Sava Parva."

In 1628 A.D. Raja Jagat Jayoti Malla wrote a drama named "Mudita Kuvalayaswa." Many European scolars have mentioned thi drama In 1629 A.D he also

wrote two other dramas named "Hara Gouri Vivaha Natak" and "Kunja Behari Nataka." The article "Nepal Bhasa Nataka" by Probodh Babu has given specimens of its language.

"Let us go to the bank of Jamuna.
There the cool breeze blows,
And trees with new leaves adorn the bank.
Bees are humming there sweetly,
That aches the heart,
And vibrates its cords."

The dramas of the time of Jagat Malla, son of Jagat Jyoti, are "Malaya Gandhini" and "Madan Charita." They were composed in 1670 A. D.

Mahamohopadhaya Hara Prosad Shastri M.A., C.I.E., has mentioned the "Aswamedha" drama written by Raja Jitamitra Malla, son of Raja Jagat Prokash. He wrote another drama in 1687 A. D named "Madag Sahvan." Another drama of his named "Gopi Chandra" was written in 1712 A. D. The drama has been written on the subject of Sannayasa or ascetic life assumed by Gopichandra, the then Raja of Rangpur, a district of North Bengal. In this drama the personæ dramatis are Raja Gopichandra, Uduna Padma and Maynamati showing a close connection between Nepal and North Bengal.

This drama is different from other plays, here is no abundance of songs and there is predominance of prose. Its language is mostly in old Bengali. We give below a specimen of it :—

Kotwal* :—I am Kotwal of Maharaja Gopichandra. Lord of Bengal. My name is Kalinga.

* Kotwal is head of Police.

Bhāgi Khora:—You have said well; I say Khetu Mahapatra-Kalinga Kotvar, just listen to a word of mine.

Khetu.—Yes, always (I shall).

Bha:—There is no other Bhagi Khora like myself who is passing his days in happiness by capturing and plundering everybody."

Khetu:—You have said right. O, Kalinga Kotvar! Let us go to see your king and my king, Raja Gopi Chandra."

After Jitamitra, Bhupatindra Malla ascended the throne of Bhatgaon. He ruled from 1695 to 1722 A. D.

The Vidyā Vilāp and the Mahabharat mentioned before, were written in his time. Besides those, Probodh Babu says, that in the Royal Library of Nepal there are two more dramas "Madhavanal and Rukmini Parinaya." There are also two incomplete manuscripts of two other dramas in Library.

Bhupatindra's son Ranjit ruled from 1722 to 1772. The Ram Charitra and Madhab Kam Kanda Kala were written in his time. Besides these, it is said that other dramas were also written in his time.

(1) Usha Haran in 1754 A.D.
(2) Andhakasur Vadhopawhyan.
(3) Krishna Charit Nataka in 1738 A.D.
(4) Madan Charita Katha Nataka.
(5) Kolasur Vadhopakhyan Nataka
(6) Ramayan in 1765 written by poet Kashinath

In addition to this Probodh Babu has mentioned

two other dramas named Gita Digamvar and Nala Charita. They were composed not in the time of the malla kings but at the time of the Kātāmundu Rajas.

The Malla Kings mentioned by us were the rulers of Bhatgaon. Three sons of Joysthti Malla, ruled over Bhatgaon, Khatmandu and Vanapat. In the time of Joyram Malla of Vanapat we hear of a sanskrit drama named "Pandava Vijaya" in 1496 A.D.

The songs of the dramas mentioned by us end with the names of the kings as their composers. Only the portions containing the descriptions of the kings and of the country are composed in the names of the poets. It is not always right to conclude that the dramas were really composed by the Rajas, because the songs end in their names. The poets out of gratitude might have written the plays in the names of the kings because they were great patrons of learning. We have mentioned before how dramas were written in the names of Sudraka and Harsha Vardhan.

The old Bengali dialect, in which these dramas are written, is supposed by many to have been the language of the old Yatras. Perhaps these dramas bear some resemblance to the old Yatras. During the Mahomedan rule as we have already seen, dramas were replaced by jatras and having received patronage of the independent Hindu Kings, Bengali Dramas were alive in Nepal and became more and more popular there.

BENGALI DRAMA IN ASSAM

In Assam, too, a drama has been found in Assamese language composed by the poet Sankar Deva The drama

consists of one act. It is written both in poetry and prose. Sankara Deva flourished during the middle of the Sixteenth Century He wrote several poems and dramas; as, Kaliya-daman Nāt, Parijat Haran Nāt Sita Swayamvara Nāt. Kotora Khola Nāt, Rāsa Jatra Nāt, Patni Prosad Nat etc Kaliadaman Nāt may have some resemblance with our Kaliadaman Jatra but we have got no copy of it.

Parijat Haran Nat. has recently been printed. Sutradhara's invocations of the Gods and his conversations are in Sanskrit while the rest of the drama is written in a language akin to the old Bengali. We give a specimen below:—

Satya Bhama. "O, my husband' Promise to give me the Parijat tree." Sri Krishna:—"O, my darling! Sinful Narakasura have robbed the Gods of all their belongings by conquering them. First let me kill him and perform the work of the Gods and then shall bring Parijat."

Satya Bhama:—"O, my husband! you have spoken right. First. do the work of Gods and then bring the Parijat tree I shall accompany you." हामु तोहावि सङ्गे चलबो।

Sri Krishna:—"You are a woman, it is not proper for you to accompany me to the battle field. तेह्रो स्त्रीजाति। युद्ध समये याइात उचित् नहे।

Satya Bhama:—"O, my Lord! I have a number of co-wives to whom shall I give the Parijat. I do not quite understand, I shall not leave your company."

Sri Krishna:—"O my darling' If you really want to go with me then get you self quickly ready

(When Sri Krishna is about to start with Satyabhama, Nārada appears).

Narada :—'O, Hari, I have hardly seen such a henpecked husband. हे हरे तुहु सम स्त्रीजित पुरुषक बहु नाहि देखि। You could not leave your wife even when going to battle. You are the preceptor of the world. Your glory is sung in the three worlds, but you have put me to shame."

Srikrishna :—"O Muniraj! What shall I do. For Parijat, Satyabhama wishes to give up her life. How can I stand her importunities ?"

Narada :—"It will take two or four years to go there with wife. For speedily doing the work of the Gods, do one thing. Your carrier is Garura bird, ask him to come. Get upon his shoulders and kill Narakasura quickly."

Srikrishna (turning to Satyabhama says) :—"O, my darling. The saint has spoken right."—आहे प्रिये ! मुनि भल कहल ।

Satyabhama :—"O my husband."

Srikrishna thinks his carrier, "Come Garura the king of birds, come quick." सत्वरे आव्, सत्वरे आव् ।

Sutradhara (in sanskrit) :—Garura then bowed down to Krishna with joined palms.

"Get upon my shoulders and proceed to the villain's place"

Garura :—"O my Lord! Why should you walk when I am living ? Get upon my shoulders, kill sinful Narakasura.

हे स्वामि ! हामि थाकिते तुहु पावे वेडारव । अः हामार स्कन्धे चढि पापी नरक सुरक बध करो मिता

Sutradhar :—Then Srikrishna got upon Garura's shoulders and proceeded cheerfully. Sutradhar then cited a sloka in Sanskrit and proceeded fast as the wind and blew his conchshell "Panchajanya."

SONG !*

चलहि गोविन्द गरुड कन्धे
नरक मारिते कयलि प्रबन्धे
वायुक वेगे चलयि पखीराज
निल एके मिलल कामरूप राज ।
फुकल शङ्ख हरि वार वार
शुनि दानवक भेल हृदिविदार ।

Govinda proceeded on Garura's shoulders.
Made preparations to slay Naraka.
The prince ot birds proceeded with the swiftness of the wind
In a moment, the Lord arrived,
Capable of assuming every form at will,
Hari blew his conchshell again and again
Hearing that sound the Giant trembled at his heart.

Sutradhar in Sanskrit sloka narrated the events and supplied the want of the modern programme. Songs and dialogues were all in Bengali. The above drama shows that the Assamese might have made advancement in drama, but the fact that it is akin to Bengali drama shows its influence there. Thus during the Mohomedan rule Mithila, Orissa, Assam and Nepal, at least, maintained the glory of the Bengali drama.

AT MANIPUR

The people of Manipur in Assam who are said to be

* Tune Kanera Rag

descendants of Bavrubāhon, son of Arjun and Chitrāngada, bear a great affinity to the Bengali Hindus. They are by creed Vaishnavas and are very fond of music. They often sing songs of Srikrishna in Kirtons to the accompaniment of khola and kartals. The daughters of Manipur, till their marriage, learn with great care to sing and dance along with other domestic duties The songs relate always to Srikrishna, and though their dialect is different from the Bengali language, but their songs are nothing but broken Bengali. Their dances are more interesting and sweet. During the Rāsh Ceremony, a big auditorium like an Amphitheatre is built when the maids (Lāisābis) clad in velvet and muslin scarf enter the arena and bowing down to the superiors begin to sing and dance. Their dance, oriental as it is, has been much appreciated by the world-renowned poet Rabindra Nath Tagore.

Everywhere in India the influence of Vaisnavism is prominent. Indeed Vaishnavism, influence of Mahaprabhu and dramas of Rupa Goswami contributed much to the development of Jatra and Theatre, and we have given rather an elaborate description of Jatra as it helped a great deal about the growth of the Bengali Stage.



THE INDIAN STAGE

PART II.

BENGAL UNDER THE ENGLISH.

THE PLAY HOUSE, THE CALCUTTA THEATRE, MRS. BRISTOW'S THEATRE, LEBEDEFF'S BENGALI THEATRE, DUMDUM THEATRE, BAITHOKKHANA THEATRE, CHOWRINGEE THEATRE & THE SANSOUCI THEATRE.

THE INDIAN STAGE

DURING THE EARLY ENGLISH SETTLEMENT.

PLAY HOUSES.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Hitherto we have traced the evolution of Indian drama from the earliest time down to the rise and progress of the Jatra in Bengal. We now come to a very important phase in the development of the Modern Bengali Stage. Many modern institutions of the country owe their present day forms to the influence of the West, and the modern Bengali Theatre is one of them. Bengali drama is no doubt of lineal descent from the ancient Sanskrit play, but, in course of time, the Bengali stage has imbibed many things from the West, and these innovations or changes came to be gradually and slowly introduced from the time of the Early English Settlement in Calcutta. We intend to study these changes in their chronological order which led to the foundation of the modern Bengali

is wrapped up in romance like the early history of the East India company. Very few chapters in history are more thrilling, more romantic, or more awful than that of a daring body of adventurers or traders prompted by a spirit of enterprise and gain, that, even inspite of themselves, brought about a vast revolution in the political history of the world. It is a truism that Englishmen, wherever they happen to be, seldom forget their national amusements and the early English theatres of Calcutta rose out of their social gatherings formed amongst the early settlers for their own recreation. The accounts of these theatres are highly interesting on account of their influence upon the early dramatic performances of the Bengalees of that time. Unfortunately, we possess no connected history of these interesting events but disjointed accounts scattered about in various scraps and papers. We, however, propose to present them, as far as possible, in their historical sequence. The following are the chief sources we had to depend for our materials :

I. The old maps of Calcutta of different periods pointing to 'theatre' at particular localities :—

i. Plan of the territory of Calcutta as marked out in the year 1742 exhibiting likewise the military operations at Calcutta when attacked and taken by Serajuddula on the 18th June 1756.

ii. Lieutenant Will's plan of Fort William and part of the city of Calcutta published in 1753.

iii. Colonel Mark Wood's map of the year 1784 1785.

iv. A. Upjohn's map of 1794 taken in 1792-1793

v Mr J R. Schalch's map of 1825

vi. Major H L. Thullier's map of 1847-1849.

This is the most authentic source as to the site of the various theatres.

II. The various accounts given by (i) Phillip Stanhope in 1774 in his "Genuine Memoirs of Asiaticus," (ii) Mrs Fay's letters written in 1780 (iii) Accounts of Miss Sophia Goldborne, authoress of "Hartley House" in 1789, (iv) Letters of the Hon'ble Miss Emily Eden in 1837-1840, (v) Memoirs of Mr J. H. Stocqueler in 1836-1841. (vi) Mr. R. C. Sterndale's account of the various 'Pattas' including that of the "Calcutta Theatre" giving an account and position of the same.

III. Mr. Hicky's Bengal Gazette of 1780-1782, The Calcutta Gazette from 1787, The Bengal Hurkura, John Bull. The Friend of India and Asiatic Journals and newspapers and periodicals with the contemporaneous events—forming the next important source of authenticity.

IV. Rev. J Long's "Calcutta Old and New", Mr. W. H. Carey's "Good old days of the John Company", Dr. Busteed's "Echoes of Old Calcutta", Sir Evans Cotton's (formerly Mr. H. E. A. Cotton) "Calcutta Past and Present", Mr. H. Blechynden's "Calcutta Past and Present", Mr. Macfarlane's "Notes on Hartley House", Rev. Walter Kelly Firminger's remarks on Mrs. Fay's Letters and the "Asiaticus", and lastly Mr. E. W. Madge's two articles in the "Statesman" of October 1905.

V. Besides the above mentioned sources, we have tried to gather certain informations from the lives and letters of the pioneers of the modern Bengali Stage and of other famous Bengalees of that time

THE PLAY HOUSE

The earliest theatre in Calcutta was the Play House in Lalbazar Street standing at the north-east corner of the Mission Row. Its position was beautiful, standing at the north-east of the Great Tank, Mission Row (then called Rope Walk) forming the eastern side of it, as the present eastern side of the Dalhousie Square did not then exist. Its position has been indicated in Will's map (1753) as being the south-west corner of the present Calcutta Police office and not to the south-west of the Tank Square as Sir Evans Cotton puts it.*

Rev. Walter Kelly Firminger, as representative of the Calcutta Historical Society, further discovered an old wall to the west of a Jute Godown (now the four-storied big house at No. 8 Lalbazar Street) to be that of the old Play House,† which gives rise to the suggestion that the premises No. 8 Lalbazar Street, opposite the Police Headquarters formed a part of the Play House. The present site has yet a faint semblance of a place of amusement and a comparison of maps of 1753 and later periods would show a near approach to the location attributed to it. ‡

Mr. Firminger writes :—

> The facade seems to betoken a place of some consequence in its day but of the old building the facade alone remains and all behind it i a Jute go-down built some 50 years ago b

* Calcutta Old and New Page 93.

† Bengal Past and Present, January 1909, an article by Miss E. Drummond.

‡ Bengal Past and p. 178 Vol. I 22 1907

Messrs. Ralli Brothers. It is conjectured that the facade may perhaps have belonged to one of the famous taverns, but may it not be possible that we have here still with us a portion of the original theatre which is known to have stood close to the corner formed by tank and Rope Walk Square?"

The English had thus a theatre even some years before the Government passed from the hands of the Nawab to the East India Company.

Sir John Clavering and Hon'ble George Monson, (colleagues of Warren Hastings and Sir Philip Francis in the Council) lived in Rope Walk subsequently, and almost opposite to it to the north was the Old Court House where St. Andrew's Church now stands. Being just opposite to the Old Fort towards the east and there being no house intervening, the Play House served as an advantageous position of offense for Serajuddulah who seized it, and thus played a prominent part in his siege of Calcutta in 1756.

The old English Church of St. Anne founded in 1709 and standing at the junction of the Clive Street and Dalhousie Square North, to the west side of the present Writers' Buildings, was also stormed and destroyed during the above siege and after things were settled down to the advantage of the British, a proposal † was on foot to convert the Play House into a Church and was actually communicated to London.

---

* Bengal Past and Present p 178 Vol. 1 December 29 190

† Hyde's Annals of Bengal

The Court of Directors, too, gave the necessary sa
tion on March 3, 1758, in the following correspondence

"We are told the building formerly made use of Theatre may with a little expense be conver into a Church of public worship as it was b by the voluntary contributions of the inha ants of Calcutta. We hope, there can be difficulty in getting it freely applied to before-mentioned purpose especially when authorise you to fit it up decently at Company's expense, as we hereby do"—*

The above proposal though sanctioned was not, h ever, carried into effect.

We get a mention of this Play House and the co tion of the Church in Philip D. Stanhope's account gi in October 1774 :—

There is a noble play house—but no church want of which is supplied by a spacious ap ment in the Old Fort, adjoining the room well-known by the name of the Black H and rendered famous by the deaths of unfortunate countrymen when the Na Serajuddula took Calcutta by storm.

Stanhope's "Asiaticus," page

This is a faithful account of the times but annotators have made a mess of the whole thing and fail to understand how Mr. Firminger in editing the pa of the above book could so unhesitatingly observe :—

"This is not the Play House in Lalbazar so fam

* Wilson—Old Fort William Vol. II page 130

> in the story of the siege of Calcutta in 1756, but the theatre which had been erected on the site is now occupied by the business house of Messrs Finlay Muir and Co."

The house mentioned here by Firminger was the "Calcutta Theatre" which was built in 1775 or the early part of 1776, the Pattah being granted in June 1775. This was called the "New Play House" to distinguish it from the "Old *Play* House" of Lallbazar. Knowing that the New Play House did not come into existence when Stanhope visited Calcutta, in 1774, we wonder how Mr. Firminger could have made the mistake. Again, Rev. Long wrote an article in the Calcutta Review (Vol. XVIII) *containing*, amongst others, the following observations :—

> "Near the Old Court House in the north-west corner of Lyon's Range, stood the Theatre which in the siege of 1757, was turned into a Battery by the Moors and annoyed the Fort very much."

The above was copied verbatim in "Old Calcutta" published by Newman and in W. H. Carey's "Good old days of the John Company," and we are bound to say all these gentlemen are not accurate. The theatre here referred to is also the Calcutta Theatre which did not come into existence in 1756 or 1757, and the plan I of 1742—1756 also points to Battery not being here, but to the east at the junction of Lallbazar Street and Mission Row

1774 during Stanhope's visit, is also true. Hicky's Benga Gazette, the first news-paper of India, started in 1780 four years after the opening of "the Calcutta Theatre' and with advertisements of the same, mentions also the old Play House as a place of auction—

"Auctions at the Old Play House for sale by Private contract.

Williamson—Vendu master to the Hon'ble Company."

This was one of the places used as an Auction House, and we agree with Dr. Busteed that Williamson the auctioneer set up here afterwards. *

The Play House no doubt existed, but there was no performance. This is also clear as "theatre" is not included in the list of amusements (balls, card parties, frequenting of European shops, Hooka-smoking) in the account given by Mr. Stanhope.

Mr. Madge however mentions that a ball-room was attached to it and English ladies used to dance here. We find no authority for this and we find that by quoting "Asiaticus" from two separate pages 30 and 34 on different subjects, he (Mr. Madge) has confounded the readers. The Play House was mentioned in page 30 and dancing by English ladies as compared to that of Indian ladies was described in page 34, one being distinct from the other. We give the following here from page 34 :—

"But extravagant as the English are in their Hooka, their equipage and their tables, yet all this is absolutely parsimony when compard to the expenses of a seraglio; a luxury which those can

* Echoes from Old 4th Edition, Page 120

enjoy whose rank in the service entities them to a princely income and whose harem, like State horses of a monarch, is considered as a necessary appendage to Eastern grandeur. However you would think even this extravagance in some degree pardonable, had you once experienced the attractive charms of an Asiatic beauty. I have seen ladies of the Gentoo caste, so exquisitely formed with limbs, so divinely turned and such expression in their eyes that if you can reconcile yourself to their complexions, you must acknowledge them not inferior to the most celebrated beauties of Europe. For my own part, I already begin to think the dazzling brightness of a copper-coloured face infinitely preferable to the pallied and sickly hue which banishes the roses from the cheeks of the European fair and reminds me of the death-struck countenance of Lazarus risen from the grave. The English ladies are immoderately fond of dancing, an exercise ill-calculated for the burning climate of Bengal and in my opinion however advisable in cooler latitudes, not a little indelicate in a country where the inhabitants are covered with no more clothes than what decency absolutely requires. Imagine to yourself the lovely object of your affections ready to expire with heat, every limb trembling and every feature distorted with fatigue and her partner with a "Muslin" handkerchief in each hand employed in the delightful office of wiping down her

face while the big drops stand impearled upon her forehead."

From the above there is nothing to justify Mr. Madge's assertion that a ball-room was attached to the theatre.

The Play House was conducted by amateur performers and was frequented by high officials. In 1772 its managers sent home a present of two pipes of Maderia to David Garrick in acknowledgment of the trouble, which they said, the great actor had taken to promote their theatrical attempts in this distant quarter.

In the map of 1792 (Upjohn) we do not find any trace of this Play House which possibly ceased to exist before that year. We do not find any trace of the Play House in the "Calcutta Gazette" of 1787 and Williamson Brothers were seen fixing their Auction-house at the spacious house of London Tavern. We do not also find any trace of it in Wood's map of 1784.

In the contemporaneous records of 1782, we find a civil suit for ejectment of George Williamson from this house by Robert Palk, a Judge of the court of Chancery who had committed Maharaja Nando Koomar to the court of Sessions. Sir Elija Impey writes in his order:—

'The house had belonged to Robert Dobinson formerly the Company's auctioneer and had been mortgaged to Palk by Dobinson. Palk last year obtained a decree of foreclosure for his house and Mr. Williamson was there in possession of the house and would not quit the house until he was turned out by the sheriff on an order founded on the decree signed by me in the vacation. It was heard. Williamson was put into possession by Palk in June 1777 and removed in person till 1st Oct.,

1781."* Thus the Play House must have ceased to exist sometime between Oct. 1781 and 1784 A.D.

Very unfortunately we possess no detailed account of this early English Theatre, nor as to what plays were performed there, as there was no Gazette, nor newspaper at the time. It was very likely that Messrs. Drake and Holwell took some active interest in it as it appears that the house though built by voluntary subscriptions was patronised by the Company. The rest, however, is lost in the hoary mist of the past.

THE CALCUTTA THEATRE
[NEW PLAY HOUSE]

The most important English Theatre that gave an impetus to the foundation of the Bengali Stage was the "New Play House" as distinguished from the Old Play House and was popularly known as the "Calcutta Theatre." The Patta † of the land was granted in 1775 (June 1st) for 5 Bighas of land which, as the map 1742-1756 (No 1) shows, had been occupied by Mr. Eyre who perished in the siege of Calcutta in 1756, and the New Theatre opened sometime in autumn 1776 or sometime earlier than that. The maps of Wood 1785-86 and of 1792 by Upjohn put "theatre" (the old Play House having disappeared by this time) at the north western corner of Lyon's Range behind the Writers' Buildings and Miss Sophia Goldborne authoress of "Hartley House" also mentions it in 1789 thus :—

"At the back of the 'Writers' Buildings is the Calcutta

* Records of the case of 1782 Jan 30th, Re Robert Palk vs George Williamson · Vide also Bengal Present and Past 1909 page 41 Jan to March.

† Vide Sterndale's account of Pattas

theatre and inside of which I am informed on good authority that it equals the most splendid European Exhibition." *

The Patta of the Writers' Buildings granted in October 1776 puts the northern boundary "by a road leading from the south railing of Play House by the house then in the occupation of James Higgins, merchant to the China Bazar. †"

The position of the theatre and arrangement of the same is further denoted by an advertisement ‡ "in *Calcutta Gazette*"—announcing under the heading "Calcutta Theatre", the following notice :—

> "On the western entrance of the theatre are opened two gateways for general accommodation. It is requested that ladies and gentlemen will order their bearers to carry in at the south entrance or that nearest the "Old Fort" and pass through the compound at the northern gate or that further from the old Fort. The rule should be observed on returning from the theatre also."

The position of the old Fort built in 1692 and dismantled in 1819 was to the west of the Writers' Buildings and Holwell's monument, on the otherside of the old Fort Street, whereon now stands the Customs House.

The Patta above referred to for "the Theatre" was granted unto seventy-four gentleman including Warren

---

* Hartley House, pages, 58-59

† Vide also Mr. Kathteen Blechynden's Calcutta Past and Present Page 71. (1905).

‡ Thursday Nov 16th 1788

Hastings, General Monson, Richard Barwell, Chief justice Sir Elijah Impey, and justices J. Hyde, John Chambers and S. C. Lemaistre, for 5 Bighas 19 cuttas and 12 chhataks of ground situated in Bazar Calcutta for *the New Theatre* which formerly belonged to John Carlier Esqr and subscribers' Rent Rs. 17-13-3 per annum in the Cutchery of the Calcutta Division, this 1st June 1775, No. 27 (patta) and collector's offices.* As we said before, this theatre was not in existence when Stanhope visited Calcutta. †

The Calcutta Theatre was so well-known that a small lane to the east, is named after it in the same maps as Theatre Street, not the present Theatre Road which also is named after another well-known Theatre of a later period.

In the next map of 1825 by Major Schalch, we find the place converted into New China Bazar and before that time we find an advertisement published in the Calcutta Gazette of the 1st November, 1808, about the last trace of the Theatre:—

> "Whereas the house and buildings called "The Theatre," wherein Mr. Raworth established an auction, was lately purchased by Babu Gopi Mohon Tagore, who has constructed several buildings which he intends for a new bazar known by the name of the new China Bazar,

---

* Chap. IV of 'An Historical account of the Calcutta Collectorate' by R. C. Sterndale, page 24.

† Philip Stanhope, an officer in the first regiment of dragoons guards came to India in 1774. He was the victim of disappointed love, the lady to whom he was attached not being allowed by her father to go to India.

notice is hereby given to the public from and after the twentieth day of November, the shops of the New China Bazar behind the Writers' Buildings will be opened where European and other articles of every description will be found for sale."

The history of the Calcutta Theatre thus continues from 1775 to 1808, and it is on this site Messrs. Finlay Muir and Co. had their business firm some years ago and at present are situated the firm of Messrs. James Finlay and Co. Limited at No. 1, Clive Street.

The locality was best suited for a theatre, and we have on the authority of Dr. Busteed,* that Sir Philip Francis occupied a house behind it. Sir Philip wrote to a friend "Here I lie, master of the finest house in Bengal with hundred servants, a country house and spacious gardens, horses and carriages etc."

"Where was this vaunted house"? Asked the Doctor; and he tells us "It is stated by a witness at a trial in Calcutta in 1778 in which Francil was the principal and he recognised the defendant as Mr. Francis who lived beyond the play house, which must be the Calcutta theatre." A reference to the maps also shows that the house, evidently large and beautiful, standing about this time nearest to the theatre on the north was the one at the corner of Old Fort Ghat Street and Clive Street; there was no house near it and its site exactly corresponds with that occupied afterwards by the Oriental Bank which Francis had occupied before.

A map of the Old Fort now hanging in the private

Dr Busteed's Calcutta 4th Ed. Page 120

reading room of the Imperial Library, Calcutta, confirms the Doctor.

THE PERFORMERS

On the site described above, the Calcutta Theatre was built at the cost of about "one lac rupees" raised by a subscription from the leading members of Calcutta society of those days and even the Governor General, the Chief Justice, members of the council and other judges of the supreme Court were subscribers and members interested in the Theatre and the actors were all respectable people. Miss Sophia Goldborne gives a very nice description of the theatre as she saw it in person* :—"The performers are all gentlemen who receive no kind of compensation, but form a fund of the admission money to defray the expenses of the house. It consists only of pit and boxes to be admitted to the first of which you pay eight rupees (20S), to the last a gold mohor (40S). It is therefore no wonder that the house is about the size of the Bath Theatre and consists of Pit and boxes only, first an area in the centre, the second a range of commodions enclosed or rather separated, seats round it, from one corner of the stage to the other. No expense has been spared to gratify either the eye or the ear; a very pleasing band of music saluted the present Governor on his entrance and the pit was crowded with spectators. It is lighted upon the English plan with lamps at the bottom of the stage and girandoles at proper distances with wax candles covered with glass shades as in the Verandahs to prevent their extinction, the windows being venetian blinds and the free circulation of air delightfully promoted by their situation."

* Vide Hartley House pages 58—59

Mrs. Fay also says† "The house was built up by subscription. It is very neatly fitted up, and the scenery and decorators quite equal to what could be expected here The parts are entirely represented by amateurs in the drama, no hired persons being allowed to act. I assure you I have seen characters supported in a manner **that would not disgrace any European stage.**" Miss Sophia however was beside herself with joy when on seing one of the performances she wrote .—

> "The character of young Meadows was very agreeably supported by one of the company's writers, a young gentleman that visits at Mr. Hartley's and is in a rising way—Hawthorn was performed by an adjutant in the artillery, Deborah Woodcock by poor Doyly's patron who has much pleasantry, Rosetta by a young gentleman in the law department, Lucinda by the son of an east India Captain and in like manner were other characters filled up and I do declare upon my word and honour that I was as well entertained as if the female parts had been sustained by females—and again wish in the cause of morality the custom could be re-established in England. The scenery was beautiful and dress superb. Here Golconda's wealth in all its genuine lustre astonished the beholder and a profusion of ornamental pearls were disposed with good taste ; in a word, whether it was the poet, or the

† Mrs. Fay was the wife of a Barrister who left Calcutta in Aug. 1782 and came again in 1784. She was [illegible] by Hyder Ali in 1780 She [illegible] her visiting Mrs. [illegible] at Belvedere House "a great [illegible] from Calcutta.

performers. or the diamonds, or the air of enchantment, they all together certainly wore, I know not, but so pleasing an effect had the whole upon my mind that I forgot Doyly, my native country, my Arabella and my mother and for the only period of my residence at Bengal was completely happy.

veral country-born ladies figured away in the boxes and by candle light had absolutely the advantage of the Europeans, for their dark complexions and sparkling eyes gave them appearance of animation and health the Europeans had no pretensions to do and their persons are genteel and their dress magnificent, whereas on the other hand, paleness and langour told the country of my birth and were not to be concealed or compensated by all that polite negligence or accomplished manners could do.

e pit was full of gentlemen of every denomination.

for myself, my attention was so engaged by the piece that my heart several times asked if it could be possible I was at the distance of 4000 miles from the British metropolis."

"Hartley's House"—page 202-207.

ove are left as excellent reminiscences* of a lady of great vivacity and culture and this along with

---

acferlane in editing the pages of Hartley House says of it :—"A ok that throws a flood of light upon the Anglo-Indian Society ost in g periods of the history of the Indian Empire."

the Patta and some accounts at the Gazette form unlike that of the old Play House, excellent records as documentary piece of evidence about the true history of the Calcutta Theatre.

PERFORMANCES

In 1780, Hicky's Bengal Gazette was first published on the 20th January and it is noticeable that the first issue contained an advertisement about the staging of the comedy.—"Beaux" with the farce ot "Lethe."

About a year after, again, we find an interesting review in the columns of the same Gazette on the staging of "Tragedy of Venice preserved" and farce of "Musicial lady" which throws much light on the performances here:—"Captain Call play'd Jaffir admirably well and may be justly styled the "Garrick of the East."

"When the Tragedy King entered in Pierre, a universal thrill ran through the house and when he described himself, a fine gay bold-faced villain—"a general concurrence of whispers seemed to pronounce—A V—he truly is. He was stiff without dignity and sonorous without meaning, totally void of originality, mounted and, hobbling on the Right Toe of imitation.

"Renault was well supported by Mr. Pawson who played his part also in the entertainment with uncommon applause.

"Captain Robinson was as pleasing in Priuli as the part would admit and highly so in the entertainment.

"Mr. Norford played Belvidera with such an unco glow of f and utterance and was so

characteristic in the description of madness as to procure him (as usual) universal applause—

"The actors of the inferior parts were not totally devoid of merit."

Vide Hicky's Gazetee, 27th January 1781.

From the above and similar accounts and description in "Hartley House" we cannot bear on with Mr. Carey that "theatrical talents must have been at a very low ebb indeed"—a view lately shared by Mr. Madge, Mr. Cotton and Mr. Macferlane, the editor of "Hartley House." They quote Mrs. Fay who was of opinion that "a gold mohor was really too much to bestow upon such a temporary gratification" and their opinion is based upon this material. Though we agree with Mrs. Fay that the price 40s (a Mohor) was too much for a seat, however entertaining the performance, we are not ready to accept the wrong assertion that theatrical talent was at a very low ebb as she also regretted in the letters that were she not debarred by the expense she should have seldom missed a representation. Her description of the performance of "Venice Preserved" which she witnessed was not also less enthusiastic. We quote the following which she wrote in March, 1781 : about the time when the equally enthusiastic review in the "Hickey's Bengal Gazette" was published :—

"I shall avail myself of this occasion and close this letter with a few remarks on our theatrical amusements. I assure you I have seen characters supported in a manner that would not disgrace any European stage— 'Venice

> Preserved" was exhibited by Captain Call of the Army. Mr. Droz (a member of the Board of Trade) and lieutenant Narfar in Jaffier, Pierra and Belvidera showed very superior theatrical talents."*

It was about the years 1789-90 M. L De Grandpere, an officer in the French Army, undertook a voyage in the Indian ocean and to Bengal and from his account† as translated into English we get the following adverse version:—"Close to the old fort in the Theatre which does not accord in appearance with the general beauty of the town and in which there are seldom dramatic representations for want of performers." We agree with the editor that this reproach would never have been uttered, had the French been the original settlers in Calcutta. Apart from the fact that since the time of that traveller, several theatres have been built and destroyed, contemporary records also prove otherwise.

The "*Calcutta Gazette*" which made timely references to the plays also supports our view about the excellent performances of the Calcutta Theatre—thus negativing the theory set up by Messrs Carey and Madge that "the performances of the Calcutta theatre were at a very low ebb." We give some instances:—

(1) Thursday January, 17, 1788 · C.G.

"The first floor on yesterday evening went off somewhat paradoxically. The principal parts were certainly played well —young and old. Whensay, Mrs. Pattipan. Nancy Tartlet and Furnish spoke and acted with spirit and humour. Yet the

* Vide Mrs. D Fay' Dated 26th 1781.

† Vol I Cal. Review 1844 Shore's biography

whole performance gave satisfaction and met few plaudits of approbation.

'The Flitch of Bacon' had more success. Many of the airs in it received applause and particularly a lively one sung by Major Benbo whose comic attitudes, dress and manner repeatedly excited bursts of laughter and general entertainment.

"The acting manager of the theatre who has ever shown the great attention to promote entertainments will, we trust, excuse the hint of the correspondent, as one of the principal musical gentlemen of the settlement is soon about to take his departure from this country. *The poor soldier* who was so universal a favourite may not be forgotten while he can be once introduced to such advantage."

(2) "Richard III played on 25th January, and 1st Feb......... boxes one gold Mohor, pit eight sicca rupees.

"We agree in the general opinion that the whole performance went off with well-merited eclat.

"The part of Richard was given in that masterly style which characterises "our Roscius"* and though the character requires all the exertions of a first-rate performer in the full possession of every faculty, it was impossible for the most critical eye to observe the smallest want of activity, even in the most bustling scenes notwithstanding the late severe illness under which the gentleman who represented it, has so long laboured and from the effects of which he is yet but imperfectly recovered.

"The character of Buckingham is a very important one in the performance and it was well-supported.

"The eldest of the Princes spoke distinctly and collectedly but the youngest was rather too young to be heard. The

* Quintus Roscius, a Roman actor so fa[illegible] upon the stage th[illegible]

scenery in general was excellent particularly the camp-scene in which Richard's pavilion was very ingeniously contrived.

"We understand the favourite musical piece of the "Poor soldier" and Foote's "comedy of the author" are in rehearsal and will be performed on Tuesday next.—"*Calcutta Gazette" 5th Feb., 1788.*

(3) Oct. 2, 1788 "Tragedy of Mohomet."

The spirit of the performers engaged the feelings and attention of the spectators through one of the most oppressive evenings that has been experienced this year.

(4) Oct. 29, 1788, "Sultan and the upholsterer" Box 12, Pit 6 (Prices lowered)

"The above farces were performed last night before a numerous and elegant audience. From the general excellence in the variety of comic humour displayed by the performers. it would not be candid or graceful to select partial sentences"

"Calcutta Gazette" 30 Oct, 1788.

(5) 8th Feb., 1788. Henry IV. Part I 22nd Feb., 1788. Do II part.

"Both the 1st and 2nd parts of the play are perfect masterpieces in this kind of writing, the tragic and comic parts being so finely connected with each other as to render the whole regular and complete, yet contrasted with such boldness and propriety as to make the various beauties of each the most perfectly conspicuous. The character of Falstaff is one of the greatest originals drawn by the pen of even the immortal Shakespeare and in the character of the Prince of Wales the hero and the libertine are so finely blended that the spectacle cannot avoid perceiving even in the greatest levity of the tavern-rake the most lively traces of the afterwards illustrious character of the conqueror of France.

"Dr Johnson says "None of Shakespeare's plays are more read than the 1st and 2nd parts of Henry IV. Perhaps no author has even in two plays afforded so much delights The great events are interesting for the fate of Kingdoms depends

on them The slighter occurrences are diverting and except one or two sufficiently probable the incidents are multiplied with wonderful fertility of invention and the characters diversified with the utmost nicety of discernment and the profoundest skill in the nature of men.'

"The representation of such a character as Falstaff* requires very uncommon and eccentric powers. It is only one of all Shakespeare's, never (we believe) even attempted by Garrick who certainly thus tacitly acknowledges his want of the requisite talents to do it justice The gentleman who performed the part on Friday night though he gave it almost entirely after a manner of his own, conveyed the humour of his author very irresistibly to the audience.

"The Prince of Wale's versatility was well-portrayed. Hotspur was the character he represented and indeed the whole play was more correctly exhibited than any we have seen this season. The house was thin: scarce any ladies and of the few who did honour the representation with their presence several quitted the house before it was half over from which it may be presumed the 'Fat night" is no favourite of the fair.

—"*Calcutta Gazette*," *28 Feb., 1788.*

(6) "Mr. Copeland's benefit on Monday night fell rather short of the expectation, the house being very thin when the present state of the weather is considered which renders it extremely uncomfortable to be shut up for several hours in the Theatre. The circumstance is easily accounted for without attributing it to any disregard for Copeland's merit which stands very well in the opinion of the settlement if a connection may be drawn from the respectable Company who did honour him with their presence.

"The farce of 'Polly Honey Comb' does not profess much to recommend it. The character of Mrs. H. is extremely disgusting and Polly though an eccentric character has no peculiar humour nor are there any very ludicrous or interesting

* It has been said that Falstaff is the [illegible] t of S[illegible] s genius.

scenes between her and either of her lovers though much might easily have been brought about. As such, so much was made of it however on Monday night as possible.

"The Waterman" as usual was received with infinite applause. Robin fell nothing short of his former excellence and the new Bundle we think by far the best we have seen in the character.—"*Calcutta Gazette*" *6th March, 1788.*

Indeed "The Calcutta Theatre" staged a number of plays—chief amongst there were Hamlet, Richard the third and other Shakespearean plays, Tragedy of Mohomet and we find in "*Calcutta Gazette*" of 25th January, 1788—the parts of Richard and Buck were excellently renrered.

In 1784, for the better accomodation of ladies and gentlemen of the Settlement the gallery was divided off into boxes. The spectators however had not much culture and would have expected hilarious laugh even in tragedies. Such a tendency had a deteriorating influence on the artists (especially if they are not paid for their labours) who try to play into the gallery and about which Mrs. Fay expressed displeasure in one of her letters:—

"One of the chief inconveniences in establishments of this kind is that performers being independent of any control will sometimes persist in taking parts to which their abilities are by no means adequate. This throws an air of ridicule over the whole as the spectators are too apt to indulge their mirth on the least opening of that kind. In fact many go to see a tragedy for the express purpose of enjoying a laugh which is certainly very ill-liberal and must prove detrimental to the hopes of an infant institution like the one in question."

Mrs. Fay's observations were justified, for the theatre owing to the above tendency was afterwards compelled to put on boards "performances of a mediocre description"

is "She would and she would not", "High Life below tairs", "Comedy of Foundling". "Like Master like nan", "School for scandal", "Farce of citizen", "Barnaby Brittle" etc.

Female parts, as we have hinted before used to be layed by males, though sometimes laughted at, but the uthoress of "Hartley House" pressed for the absence of women on grounds of morality. This is what she rrote :—*

"Though you must understand the stage of Calcutta is under regulations which Britain has renounced, for there are no female performers; and I could most heartily wish that this reproach of morality could be done away with in England. The custom, you know, is foreign and alone imported by the polished Charles on his return from exile in foreign lands; and you will not attempt. I am persuaded, to deny that this fatal change in theatrical politics has rendered the play-houses so many nurseries of vice or public seraglios far more censurable and licentious than any the Eastern world contains;—for the difficulty here is for any male individual (except their owner) to get into them; whereas in your metropolis every nocturnal exhibition of even the most sentimental drama is an advertisement where gentlemen on certain conditions may be accommodated with a temporary companion and I blush to recollect the incompatibility

* Vide Hartley House pages, 90—91.

thereof with delicacy and propriety. But I will tell you more of my mind on this subject when I have been with you what effect dress can bring forth (as ladies) on the smart young fellows of Calcutta, on theatrical ground."

ACTRESSES.

In 1788, Jan. 3, the fourth or last subscription assembly of the season was held at the Old-Court House —Mrs. Bristow, a fair and popular lady of the Settlement and Mr. Camac opened it. From the songs and dances of the lady and her indication to open in near future a theatre with female artists, the Calcutta theatre got the clue and towards the latter part of the year engaged a lady as female artist whose acting and charm made the Calcutta Theatre very attractive. It will be interesting to our readers how the contemporary papers viewed her presence :—

(1) "The theatrical performance of yesterday evening having ended at the instant almost of this paper of going to the press it is impossible for us to do any degree of justice to the merits of it. We shall content ourselves therefore with saying that every part was well-supported and that no play within our recollection even appeared to give equal satisfaction to its spectators whose plaudits were unceasing and universal. A numerous assembly was attracted by the **novel appearance of a lady** whose condescension to grace the Calcutta stage would alone entitle her to lasting remembrance and whose representation of the most ingenious captivating character of Celia will assure for her the perpetual admiration of all who had the happiness to observe it.

—Calcutta Gazette 18th Dec 1788

(2) We get from another issue .. "The exhibitions

on Friday evening realised the expectations we have expressed of the attention of a liberal society, to the merits and claims of the lady who has of late so much enhanced the entertainment of the Calcutta stage. The house was crowded and if as we earnestly hope the current rumour be well-founded the benefit was extensive. The performances were nothing inferior to those who have already almost exhausted panegyric. The "Old Maid' indeed does not profess in itself wherewithal to give perfect satisfaction. But every spark of humour it contains was displayed and such parts as admitted of excellence received ample justice. Mrs. Harlow gave little scope to the talents of our fair Heroine but in the "Romp" her vivacity and comic gaiety had full play and excited universal admiration and applause.

"Walty also was eminent and indeed the whole farce though nothing perhaps can be conceived more trivial and ridiculous, was represented most happily.

Calcutta Gazette 22nd January, 1789.

"The "School for Lovers" was performed at the Theatre on Tuesday evening and we regret for the sake of those who were absent to a very thin attendance for we scarcely ever remember to have seen any plays more uniformly well-acted and where each character was so distinguished by peculiar excellence.

"Delicacy and sentiment in the conduct of a genius and disinterested passion were eminently displayed by Celia and Sir John Dorilant and the Tout Ensemble gave sensibility to the heart and a lesson to the understanding.

Calcutta Gazette 12th Feb., 1789

We also quote the following to show how the performances were generally done.

(3) "Tit for Tat" for the benefit of Mr. Copeland.

April 2, 89—"The heroine attracted the attention which has heitherto crowned all her theatrical exhibitions in the lady disguised as the maid and the metamorphosed Irish servant

afforded full scope to the comic humour of the gentleman who filled the character. The real master and the real servant were also *excellent* and it were injustice to the gentleman for whose benefit the play was performed to omit that he represented the old man, with much success. The "Solo" after the first Act received universal applause."

1789—24 the Sept.—Box 12 S. R. Pit 6.

This evening will be performed a new comedy of three Acts called the Midnight Hour.

(4) *Oct. 1, 1789. Calcutta Gazette*

"The comedy of Midnight Hour was performed on Thursday last with great applause. Mrs. H. never displayed more vivacity and charms than in Flora and we will venture to predict that the lady who played Julia from her figure and manner will be a valuable acquisition to our theatrical amusements.

"All the characters were exceedingly well-supported. The Marquis and Nicholas are old favourites and it is impossible that Mr. G. or Mr. P. can never act without delighting the audience.

"The house was totally well-filled and the Boxes graced with much additional beauty and elegance.

"We are very glad to hear the Manager proposes in future to thread the boxes and Pit together, an alternation which had long been wished and which will contribute much to the ease and convenience of the audience."

15th Oct. 89—"**The Indian drama of Sakuntolla**" or the Fatal Ring which has been most liberally given by the learned translator for the benefit of insolvent debtors a most pleasing and authentic picture of old Hindu manners and must be considered as one of the greatest curiosities the Literature of Asia has produced."

21th Oct. 89.—The citizens and May Day or The Little Gipsy Box 12 S. R. Gallery 6 S R

12th April 90—"She stoops to conquer" for the benefit of Mrs. Hughes.

Before the comedy will be recited. "The Shadows of Shakespeare" and a monody on the death of "David Garrick" will be sung.

(5) April 22 1790—"The Revenge" on Thursday next will be played for Mr. Battle. Captain S. has, we understand, with great good nature undertaken to play the part of Zanga—a part which will afford that gentleman ample opportunity of displaying theatrical talents.

"The Revenge" very justly ranks amogst the first of our tragedies and from the excellent manner in which we venture to pronounce it will be acted on the present occasion can not fail to attract numerous audience independently of the liberality of the settlement which is not solicited in vain

(6) May 6, 1790—Calcutta Theatre is not an object of equal criticism; when excellence calls for praise we are bound in justice as well as gratitude to give it; but when there is no ground for praise though justice may demand impartiality, gratitude for the disinterested endeavour to please, forbids the avowal of dissatisfaction. In the late performance of the "Revenge"—the representation of Alonzo appeared to us alone entitled to the eulogium due to eminence and the well-known talents of Mr. P. renders it unnecessary to say more regarding him than that he played as usual and exhibited the character he now assumed with the fame and success as he did that of Zanga on a former occasion when the public were gratified by seeing the two conspicuous parts of this play filled by him and our Indian Roscius now absent.

The piece of music after the play was well-received as was also the song from Hafiz translated by Sir Willian Jones though it certainly derived no advantage from the tune to which it was sung.

In the "Irish Widow" the lady who before gave so much satisfaction was again eminently successful. Her vivacity just

conception of the character and exact representation of it deserved and received general applause. Of her coadjutors old Keckfey, Bates and Thomas can alone be distinguished for success in any degree equal. To the 'remande' we can only return our thanks for their desire to enterain us.

We get an account of the following plays also —

4th Dec. 90. The Musical Lady.

10th Feb. 91. Comic opera "Inkle and Yarico."

24th Feb. 91.—Love in village and The Poor Soldier.

3rd March, 91.—Mr. Cowley's comedy—"A bold stroke for a Husband."

19th April, 91.—Mrs. Ormsley's benefit.—The child of Nature and The Poor Soldier

For the benifit of Mrs. Huges—RULE BRITANNIA.

22nd July 91.—The Guardian and virgin unmasked.

2nd September. 91.—France's "Bernaby Brittle" and the Ghost

10th November, 91.—Favourite opera Inkle and Yarico Boxes and Pit 16, Upper boxes 12, Gallery 6.

For Mrs. Armusley's benefit, "The Busy Body with the Flitch of Bacon."

15th March, 1992:—Both the pieces, "All the world's a stage", "The Poor Soldier", were admirably well got up and went off much better than any other performance we have witnessed this season. The loughable farce "All the world's a stage", kept the house almost throughout the whole of its play in a roar, which was mellowed into a more elegant and rational pleasure by the delightful performances which succeeded. The songs were executed with much judgment and taste. "Dear Tom, this brown sug" was particularly and deservedly applauded.

"The squeeze to St. Paul" was introduced between the lines and was delivered with much energy and point."

28th Dec. The Agreeable Surprise.

19th January. 1793. Rawroth as master of the ceremonies issues notices about 'assemblies.'

24th January. 93.—The Road to Ruin. Pit and Boxes one mohar. Gallery Rs. 8.

11th April. 93—For benefit of J Battle. "The Midnight Hour and Amateurist."

May. June and July. The Promenade and Card. 29th Nov. 92. The wonder.

17th Feb. 1794.—The Country Girl go back.

1794.—26th March 94.—Comic tragedy of "Chrononbotonthologos'.

21st Aug. Mrs. Cowley's farce.

21st Dec. The Barnaby Brittle, and Rule Britannia.

31st March, 1796.—The trip to Scotland.

In all the above plays the lady-artists did very well.

Sometimes, performances were held for charity. From the old *Calcutta Gazette* we find benefit performances were held in aid of Mrs. Crucifix, a wooden legged veteran, for Mrs. Hughes, Mr. Ferninder Batland and for the manager—Mr. Soubise who also carried on business as a professor of Fencing. We also notice there that the actress who appeared as Lucius, the page of Brutus, in the Julius Ceaser had a complimentary poem presented to her, whereof the opening lines stand thus :—

"When with new powers to charm our partial eyes,
Thy beauteous form appears in virile guise."

Thus the appearance of women upon the stage was a great innovation, but the Calcutta Theatre went a step further and took a turn at the male characters as well.

It is said that the great English actor Garrick sent

one Mr. Bernhard Messinc an actor from London in 1776 to regulate the theatre and superintend the selection of scenario to be sent out therefrom. Though we don't get any authentic account except the story of a later correspondent from "Englishman," we know that Mr. Messinc and Mr. Peter Reed with a subsidy from Warren Hastings started in 1781 the "India Gazette" as rival to the 'Bengal Gezette' of Mr. Hicky where they used to be ridiculed as 'Barnaby Grizzle' and 'Peter Nimuk' in the dramatic notices humorosly published by Hicky.*

A Ball Room was attached which was in frequent request, and we have the authority of Mr. Macfarlane that when the Old Court House was dismantled in 1792, the theatre was for a long time used for large gatherings —such as public dinner, meeting etc.

Lord Cornwallis is said to have evinced marked displeasure against any government-servant taking any part in the performance.

"Subscription Theatrical Performances" were started in October of the year 1795. Six performances were to be given in the "Season", and a subscriber paying 120 Sicca rupees was entitled to a "ticket for the season for himself and every body of his family". Single tickets were of 64 rupees each. The first subscription-play took place on the 30th October when the farce of "Trick upon Trick" or "the vinter in the Suds" with the musical entertainment of "The Poor soldier" was represented. Pit and boxes were sixteen rupees, upper boxes twelve rupees and gallery eight rupees.

* Hicky's 'Bengal June 1781 Reed was a Salt-Agent.

The doors of the theatre usually opened at 8 p.m, and the door keepers were generally Europeans, for, as Miss Sophia Goldborne was told, 'black people in an office of that nature would have no authority with the public.'

Hartly's House, page 154.

The Theatre, however, ran shortly into debt; its popularity gradually declined—because its locality was becoming unfashionable. It continued to give amusements until Babu Gopi Mohan Tagore purchased it, added to the buildings and constructed the whole of the premises in the New China Bazar. Before the purchase, the theatre must have been closed for some time, for an auctioneer Mr. Rawroth lived there as we found Wilkinson, the Vendu-Master, living in the old Play House.

HARMONICAN TAVERN

There was another place of amusement in Lal Bazar where the office of the Commissioner of Police now stands—opposite the old jail. It was the famous Harmonic Tavern, then the handsomest house in Calcutta and proved a great comfort to the people in jail. It was the scene of all the gaiety and revelry of old Calcutta, and was founded in the days when strangers considered "every house was a paradise where youngmen stayed as long as they liked." Mrs. Fay wrote of it.—

> "I felt far more gratified some time ago when Mrs. Jackson procured a ticket for the Harmonic which was supported by a select number of gentlemen who each in alphabetical relation gave a concert, ball and supper during the cold

season—I believe once a fortnight. We had a great deal of delightful music and lady C—who is a capital performer on the harpsichord played amongst other pieces a sonata of Nicholai's in a most brilliant style."*

THE LONDON TAVERN

The London Tavern, which was, not far off was another fashionable resort of the early English settlers.

---

* Vide Mrs. Fay's letters page 91

CHAPTER II

Mrs. BRISTOW'S THEATRE

THE FIRST PRIMA-DONNA OF BENGAL

Inspite of Miss Sophia Goldborne's strong protests against the introduction of female artists on the stage, it was considered necessary to have female parts represented by members of the fair sex. However skilful and good looking a boy-actor may be, he cannot always adequately represent a female character. He will surely lack in certain graces, especially in voice and look. We all know that from Shakespeare's time down to the Restoration, the female characters were represented by boys, and that on account of Puritanic austerities, the theatre itself was closed by two Ordinances of the Long Parliament of Cromwell, in 1647, forbidding all stage-plays and declaring all players as 'rogues.' It was Sir William Davenant who introduced female characters for the first time in England in 1662 at the revival of theatre by King Charles II, after his restoration to the throne, Mrs. Saunderson being the first woman in the role of Mrs. Jane in "Seige of Rhodes" in Sir William's new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. How the male actors ordinarily fared in female characters personated by them, has been humorously mentioned by a contemporary English poet who had written a prologue to "Othello

"Our women are defective and so sized,
"You'd think they were some of the guard disguised,
"For to speak truth, then act, that are between
"Forty and fifty, wenches of fifteen,
"With brow so large, and nerve so un-compliant,
"When you call Desdemona, enters giant."

It is needless to quote the well-known lines of Shakespeare where Cleopetra speaks of her representation by a boy.

In the rival Company of Thomas Killegrew known as the King's Company, too, was a remarkable lady Nell Gwayn whose excellent voice was appreciated even by the king. It is said that before that she used to knock about from tavern to tavern.

In Bengal, too, as we have incidentally seen before, we owe to Mrs. Bristow the introduction of this highly desirable change, and we shall describe her more fully here.

In the time of Warren Hastings, there lived a very accomplished and fashionable lady at Chinsura in the person of Miss Emela Wranghum. She was the most charming woman of her time, and was considered as the "toast of Calcutta." Yet such a lady used to be often criticised by Mr. Hicky in "the Bengal Gazette", under the *nom de plume* of critic "Trim," where she is referred to as "Turban conquest", "The Chinsura Belle", or "Beauty", or "Hooka Turban", and sometimes as "St. Hellena Felly", because she came from St. Helena where her father was an officer; and on one occasion "Trim" wrote the following lines with reference to her exceedingly

foppish dress under the caption: "On the present mode of dress humbly inscribed to a certain fair damsel" :—

"If Eve in her innocence could not be blamed,
"Because going naked she was not ashamed,
"Whoever views the ladies as ladies now dress,
"That again they grow innocent sure will confess.
"And that artfully, too they retaliate the evil,
"By the devil once tempted, they now tempt
the devil."

Such was the caustic comment upon the fair lady whose marriage was constantly announced in the same gazette and her suitors, too, were humorously caricatured. Milton the disappointed lover used to be referred to as "Jack Paradise Lost", and counsel Davis was nicknamed as "Counsellor Feeble." On one occasion, the following lines appeared in the Bengal Gazette :—

"The celebrated beauty has again, we hear, refused Idea G. It is true there is a little disparity of age between the parties, yet there are few ladies in her situation who would have declined the offer on that account, or would have thought it would have counterbalanced a settlement of £20,000. The truth is,—"counsellor feeble" has capered her out of her senses."*

It may strike our readers how a paper edited by a respectable gentleman could be so full of fulmination and infamous scandals about the private character of individuals. It is, therefore, necessary to remember the social atmosphere of that time. Not to speak of ordinary servants of the company, whose sole ambition was to enrich

* Idea George was the nick of Mr Lavius.

themselves at any cost, but even the highest of Company's officials did not hesitate to commit forgery, and members of the Council (in the person of Barwell and Clavering) openly quarrelled, the latter charging the former with dishonesty, while the former called his associate "a Liar."

This quarrel, however silent might have been, was amply made up by the blood shed by the Governor-General himself who shot his associate Sir Philip Francis in the famous duel at Alipur. Even the Chief Justice, as a well-known Journalist remarked, was a model of rapacity, corruption and injustice; judges were cruel, and amongst others, Francis rightly or wrongly was accused of seduction of a beautiful young lady. The story, true or false, certainly testifies to a low standard of morality even amongst persons who stood at the top of society. There was no church, and if a habitation was found in a room of the Fort, no chaplain was found to officiate there as a priest. Gambling and drinking were the principal sources of enjoyment. Balls, and immoderate dancing, masqueraders always indulged in, often gave rise to affray, riot and other scandals which Mr. Hicky would not miss to publish in his sarcastic and enlivening manner, and very often in the form of advertisements for dramatic representation. But inspite of Mr. Hicky's dark hints, Mr. John Bristow proved to be the happy man and according to the Bengal Marriage Records (outside stations) the entry of this one ran as follows:—

> "On May 27, 1782, at Chinsura, Bristow senior merchant in the Hon'ble John Company's service, and Amelia Wrangham by permission of the Hon'ble Governor-General"

Mr. John Bristow was an official ally and close friend of Sir Philip Frincis.* She was 19 at the time of marriage, while her husband was 32. This was the lady who took prominent part in the social life of "Old Calcutta." She became an accomplished actress and Dr. Busteed considers, "by the indulgence of her admiring husband had a private Theatre of her own in her Chowringhee-house in the time of Lord Cornwallis at 1788, where they entertained their wide circle of friends. Her strong points were in comedy and in humorous singing."

It appeared that she earnestly commenced performances from Friday the 1st May 1789 in her own Theatre, opening with "Poor Soldier." Some artists from the Calcutta theatre joined her and she was assisted by a number of fair ladies. The full description of her 'Theatre', how she acquitted herself on the first night and how she and her companions were received by the rapturous audience may be gathered from a contemporary review of the *"Calcutta Gazette" dated May 7, 1789* :—

"POOR SOLDIER" AT MRS. BRISTOW'S THEATRE

"Our immediate reader need not be informed that the theatre in which the first private play has been exhibited at Calcutta was erected by the lady whose name we have taken the liberty of mentioning above. It was not merely an apartment in a house temporarily fitted up for a single representation, but a distinct edifice com-

* Of him along with others W used to say Livius, shee and Ducarel were the legs of Mr Francis.

pletely furnished with every usual convenience and decorated with every ornament customary in familiar places of exhibition—in short a perfect theatre differing only from a public one in its dimensions and agreeing with it in the essential point of being appropriated to amusement without which we might fear that we had tasted joy only to lament the loss of it.

"The entertainment began a little after eight o'clock with a prologue in Muse :—

"Though the public theatres confess my sway,
And longing thousands all my nods obey."

—Which was delivered by the fair hostess of the evening with the diffidence natural to a first appearance but at the same time with a grace and expression equally natural to her that did more than justice to the sentiments of the address—an address which seemed the spontaneous effusion of a real ambassadress from the fancied genius of comic ease, wit and humour and met from every eye and every heart, the reception it professed to observe in the smiles of a delighted audience.

"In the succeeding representatien, she was again recognised in the captivating Nora: and supported by an inimitable display of combined talents in her companions. .. ..

"For reasons above-stated, we forbear entering on particulars! suffice it to say that Nora and Cathlien never appeared with equal charms of a Calcutta stage before, that each had every requisite to give complete satisfaction. that all that could be wished, ease of man r and of n marked throughout a perfect

knowledge of character alone deviated from by the improvement of polished elegance. Beauty assisted with a resistless influence and harmony lent her enchanting aid and novelty enhanced the charms of the whole.

"Derby and Father Luke having been represented by the gentlemen who before played those parts on the Calcutta Stage with much success, it would be enough to say for them that they equalled themselves on such occasions but we must add injustice to the former that he outdid his past doings. The other characters were well supported but being of less consequent will not admit differentiation. The scenery was admirable and the Orchestra though last in description, by no means so, in its claims to praise. The skill of the gentlemen who conducted it contributed much to the pleasure of the evening.

"In fine, never was any performance of the kind moie happily or more completely exhibited. Nothing was wanting and we venture with certain confidence to say that no one of the respectable company present has spoken of the entertainment but in terms warmly expressive of the most perfect gratification."

Calcutta Gazette, May 7, 1789.

Referring to another of her performances "The Sultan" and "the Padlock", a highly gratified critic exclaims in admirtation :—

"To say that these performances equalled the high expectations formed of them would be injustice. The acknowledgments of all present proved every expectation far exceeded. Free from the embarrassment of a first appearance, the fair hostess ent her guests with

all her native ease and vivacity and never were her various perfections displayed to greater advantage than in the characters of Roxalana and Leonora. After a very lively prologue to "The Sultan" spoken by Roxalana :—

"It is held we know to be the Drama's part
To raise the genius and to mind the heart.
I Roxalana do the act decree,
And where's Turk who dares dispute with me
Emboldened thus to-night behold us try—
Again to charm the ear and please the eye—"

Welcoming again her friends, professing her end to be to please and proposing a treaty founded on reciprocity, she went through the whole of the humorous part of the English slave in the Ottoman seraglio with a justness of conception and success of execution most admirable. Magnificently decorated by art and more beautifully adorned by nature, the extravagances of the amorous Sultan seemed justified by her charms. Her emphatic elocution gave every sentiment unusual energy; and no one could the fair sex have chosen more fit to assert their superiority, their endowments and their right of domination. In an Epilogue written for the purpose she again portrayed the outline of the character she had represented, drew inferences applicable to her own country-women and concluded with a 'moral' from Pope :—

"Beauties in vain,
Their pretty eyes may roll,
Charms strike the fight
But merit wins the Soul."

Mrs. Bristow's success in the part of Leonora was so remarkable that we cannot restrain quoting verbatim the observations of the same critic :—

"In Leonora, her talents had a different range and abundantly proved their diversified excellence. The costly vestments of a royal favourite were changed to the simpler habitements of a rustic maid, secluded from the world and its fashions : and the wild gaiety of the former was succeeded by the sobriety of the latter. Yet beauty, all powerful beauty still remained and with it the combined allurements of innocence and harmony—the most interesting expression of look and manner, the most captivating influence of eloquence and modulation. The whole of the dialogue manifested the nicest feeling of the character exhibited and though we can not say the same of all the songs, the comic action and figure of Duenna having in one, forced a smile instead of a tear, behind the white handkerchief of the ward, we can with truth assert that the whole of the charming airs assigned to her were sung in a style most masterly."

Calcutta Gazette Oct. 29, 1789.

OTHER ARTISTS

We have described the appreciation of contemporary critics about Mrs. Bristow, which was justly her due. It will be interesting to know about other artists of the Private Theatre of Mrs. Bristow from the same issue of the Gazette :—

"The young lady who made her premiere entree on the stage as Elmira, did all possible justice to the character and received applause universal , but the little room

afforded for the exertion of talents scarcely furnished grounds for judging of her theatrical powers. We hope to enjoy a future opportunity of seeing them displayed to a geat extent.

"As to the parts of Sultan and Osman, it is sufficient to say that the former was filled up by Mr. Pollard, the latter by Mr. T. Rowarth. Their abilities as performers in a wide field have been abundantly established.

"In "the Padlock", the Duenna claims our earliest notice among the remaining personages not indeed on account of her sex, as captain Gladwin was on this occasion per proxy, but on account of her transcendent (not charms but) merits which as above stated are superior. Never did Ursula give more complete satisfaction to her observers than on Tuesday evening. Her figure, action, expression were incomparable and her songs delivered with all possible humour and propriety. We have already alluded to one instance of the effect of her comic manner and we may add without exaggeration that the same effect was general. A constant smile marked constant approbation.

"Don Diego and Miengo both press next for attention and claim the greatest encomiums for their representatives Captain Golding and Mr. Bird. We must however to avoid prolixity content ourselves with saying they played and sang with taste and humour and conclude with an application of nearly the same terms to Captain Bird who filled the part of Leander.

"On the whole this exhibition, we may truly say, was nearly perfect in its kind. The orchestra under the of a gentleman of known abilities was of the

first degree of excellence. The evening cool, the accommodations good—improved since last performance by additions and the scenery extremely well painted.—The favoured company were in number somewhat more than hundred, all of whom appeared to be completely gratified and, in the further words of Pope, to enjoy sensibly :—

"A feast of reason and a flow of soul."

IN MALE CHARACTERS

"Polly Honey-Combe" in Colman's play of that name (made popular by miss Pope) was also a favourite of Mrs. Bristow's. She also excelled herself in the male part of Lucius in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Following her example, grew up the practice of representation of male parts by female artists. "Thus the lady amateurs once started" says Dr. Busteed, "soon became more ambitious and took a turn occasionally at some of the male characters." Indeed this change began to be so rapid that at some time in the thirties of the last century the same play was produced by a distinguished band of Calcutta amateurs, but by a daring innovation the part of Cassius made a female one, was played by an actress *enfemme.*"

HER DEPARTURE

Thus Mrs. Bristow entertained the Calcutta settlers with her brilliant accomplishments and she was the talk of

* In England also the female performers became so popular that some plays were represented entirely by women as they had previously been by men, in particular, the "Parson's wedding" a comedy by Killigrew which on its revival, was wholly performed by females although there were seven male and six femal characters in this piece exclusive of ts.

the day. We are, however, afraid that both Dr. Busteed and Sir Evans Cotton while editing "Hartley House" have fallen to an error by attributing an extremely flattering verse to her, though it really belonged to an actress of the Calcutta Theatre. The representation was so marvellous that a critic wrote an ode on Mrs.— appearing in the character of Lucius in the tragedy of Julius Caesar, at the "*Calcutta Gazette*" in the following lines :—

"When with new powers to charm our partial eyes
Thy beauteous form appears in virile guise
Such tempting graces wanton o'er thy air,
By gentle Lover's enchanting wiles I swear
Each throbbing youth would ....

And then the writer stopped short and could not proceed further in his superfluity of feelings.

Thus we find Mrs Bristow was not the only exception but this lady, too, set very many "youths throbbing" by her beautiful appearance in "virile guise." But comparison apart, this much is certain that Calcutta was so much dazzled by her (Mrs. Bristow's) histrionic perfection that when she returned to England in 1790, "her departure", says Dr. Busteed, "eclipsed the gaiety of Calcutta, and for long, Calcutta refused to be comforted"

The public theatres no doubt felt her full sway but it will not be correct to assert as some people do, that the Calcutta Theatre followed her private theatre at Chowringee in introducing women, although it got the clue from her songs and dances. She appeared at the Old Court House in January 1788, and the Calcutta Theatre introduced a lady towards the end of the same

year. Her own Theatre at Chowringee was, however, started five months after the introduction of women in Calcutta Theatre, but this cannot be denied that she was the pioneer in the field, as the idea emanated from her and she was the first lady-actress appearing before the public in January 1788, in the Old Court House.

We have on the authority of "Percy Anecdotes" that "it was about this time Mrs. Cargill, an actress of some eminence, was showing her mark both in comedy as well as in tragedy. Her benefit at Bengal amounted to the astonishing sum of £1,500 sterling. On her return home,she was unfortunately lost with several other passengers on board the Nancy Packet, and was found on the rocks of Scilly floating with an infant clasped fast in her arms."*

---

* The same book speaks of her activities in Bengal from 1782 to 1784. We have got no corroboration of this from any t. Even if the facts are t, the date is a

CHAPTER III

LEBEDEFF'S BENGALI THEATRE

The Play-house, the Calcutta Theatre and Mrs. Bristow's Private Theatre were all intended for the entertainment of the European residents of the Indian Settlement and their success inspired a Russian adventurer, Mr. Heresim Lebedeff, to organise Bengali performances in the heart of Calcutta with the assistance of a Bengali linguist, Babu Goloknath Das, but for whose help such an entertainment could not have been possible at all. To-day Mr. Lebedeff is being extolled everywhere, as he rightly deserves, but who cares to know about the Bengali linguist? It was only Sir George Grierson in an article in the Calcutta Review (October 1923) not only gave details of Lebedeff's Theatre, from the "Introduction" of a Sanskrit Grammar (a Grammar of Pure and Mixed Indian Dialect methodically arranged in Calcutta according to the Brahmenian system of the Sanskrit language) published in London by Lebedeff in the year 1801 A. D. but also made fitting enquiries about the linguist Goloknath Das. The ball was thus set rolling, and the same story is everywhere repeated about Lebedeff without any new information and none has as yet succeeded in unearthing any thing about Golak Das. Be that as it may, Sir George deserves our sincerest thanks for quoting verbatim the introduction which has now become a chief authority on the subject.

It will be, however, wrong to assume that Sir George was the earliest historian about Lebedeff. Various writers have mentioned Lebedeff before Sir George and the most notable of them is Mr. W. H. Carey who first of all wrote in 1882, mentioning the following details* :—

(1) Lebedeff's Theatre existed in 1795.

(2) It was in Doomtolla, a lane leading out of the Old China Bazar.

(3) The theatre was decorated in the Bengali style.

(4) It opened with a play called "The Disguise."

(5) Governor-General Sir John Shore's permission was secured.

(6) Performers belonged to both sexes.

(7) Poet Bharat Chandra Roy's songs were set to tune.

Mr. Carey does not say in so many words that the play was staged in Bengali because his research was not complete, though he speaks about "*performers of both sexes.*" To the present-day readers it might appear really surprising and wonderful that actresses were introduced about a century and a half ago, as a recent author has really doubted our assertion, not knowing that before this Mrs. Bristow had started with actresses, and the Calcutta Theatre also followed suit.† What is, however, regrettable is that Mr. Carey does not give us the source of his information, although what he had said has turned out to be true. It is certain that the preface of Lebedeff's Grammar was not his source, for then his account would

* Vide "Good old days of the Honourable John Company" Vol. 1. pag 101 by Mr W H Carey

† Vide pages 198 219 supra

have been more accurate. He, however, seems to have obtained the information from an issue of the "Calcutta Gazette" taking isolated portions, thereof, although he does not give its date.

(2) The second document mentioning Lebedeff is the 16th part of "Viswakosh" in Chapter "Rongaloy" lit. The "Stage", of in 1311 B. S. corresponding to 1904. For the first time it was mentioned in a Bengali book by a Bengali writer—"Lebedeff's New Theatre in Doomtola (China bazar) in 1795." The source of this writer must have been Carey's book, but imperfect as the original was, he went one step further and wrote from his fancied impression what Mr. Carey could not have imagined that "Disguise" was the English translation of Vidyasundar and the English amateurs staged it in English under the name of Chhadwabeshi (Disguise), probably because the hero Sundar saw his love Vidya in disguise.

The influence of Viswakosh has not yet disappeared even in these days of research, as only a couple of years ago, our esteemed friend Babu Purna Chandra De, B.A., Udbhatsagore, in one of his articles, wrote that Vidyasundar was staged in English in the year 1795 under the name of Chhadwabesh.

(3) Mr. E. W. Madge in an article in the "Statesman" on the Calcutta stage simply mentions that "Lebedeff will open a theatre in Doomtollah which is now-a-days disguised under the name of Ezra Street."

"Statesman" Oct. 22, 1905.

(4) Mr. H. E. A. Cotton (now Sir Evans) also in his *"Calcutta Old and New" page 152* in the year 1907 A.D., simply follows Mr Madge mentioning the same thing

that "the theatre was opened at the Ezra Street, but neither Sir Evans nor Mr. Madge mentions anywhere as to how Doomtala got the name of Ezra Street.

(5) Next, Mr. C. E. Buckland in 1906 in his "Dictionary of Indian Biography" gives some history of Lebedeff that "he translated two English plays, 'Disguise' being played in 1795 and 1796."

The source of Mr. Buckland's account was surely the "Preface" to the grammar but he gives in addition a short narration as how the last days of Mr. Lebedeff were employed in the Russian Foreign Office and how he founded a Sanskrit Press under the name "Imprimerie Indienne" and published his Grammar in 1801.

Bucklands "Indian Biography" page 248.

Mr. Buckland uptil now has given the correct version, but after it also two gentlemen gave a confused version of the real facts :—

(6) One R. D. writes in the "Journal" of Dec. 22, 1907 saying—

A Mr. Lebedeff opened a theatre by permission of the Hon'ble the Governor General in Dhurmtollah in 1795...........

This was also repeated in the "Bengal Present and Past." page 178 Vol. I.

The name of the street given by R. D. is a mistake, besides he does not give us any new facts at all.

(7) In September, 1910, the late Byomkesh Mustafi gave an account of Lebedeff in the monthly journal "Rangamancha" (*Aswin 1317*), but Mr. Mustafi's short account is nothing but a summary of Mr Carey's

version, though he did not acknowledge it. Besides, his surmise there, is absolutely incorrect. Mr. Mustafi says that songs* of Vidyasundar in imitation of Gopal Oorey were inserted in the play "Chhadwabesh", as those songs were very popular at that time.

Gopal Oorey, as we have already seen, was a famous Jatrawalla of Vidyasundar theme. These Jatras came into vogue after 1822,† and Gopal Oorey flourished some years after that day. It is, therefore, surprising that Mustafi should suggest that songs of Chhadwabesh in 1795 were in imitation of Gopal Oorey's songs. Besides Mr. Mustafi does not any where state that the play "Chhadwabesh" was a Bengali Drama.

In a newly published book called "Bangiya Natyashalar Itihash", by Mr. Brajendra Nath Banerji, Mustafi has been given the credit for first publishing in Bengali an account of Mr. Lebedeff in 1910 ; that this is not correct will be amply clear from what we have already stated above. Dr. S. K. De, a professor of the Dacca University, has written a preface to the book in which he says that the author (Mr. Banerji) has never spared his predecessors in their mistakes, or inaccuracies. It is a matter of wonder that this inaccurate statement made by the author, referred to above, was not detected by Dr. De. It has struck us, however, that Mr. Banerji's research about Mr. Lebedeff, at any rate, is not sufficiently deep. As for

* The text says 'Bharat Chandra Roy's words were set to tune." Mr. Mustafi's statement that Vidyasundar songs were inserted though probably correct, was written as a surmise.

† (1) Vide our account page 124, 130.
(2) Bangadarshan Magh 1289 B. S.
(3) Prof. Amullya Charan Vidyabhusan's article "যাত্রা" in the Probashi, Magh, 1338 B. S.

Dr. De, he has on previous occasions committed mistakes, regarding Lebedeff, which we never expected from him and the supine attitude maintained by him in these matters, is pathetic.

(8) In 1915 a book "History of Calcutta, New and Old" in Bengali was published by Babu Harisadhan Mukerjee. This book contains the verbatim account in Bengali of Mr. Carey's version. There is, however, no surmise, or mistake in fact.

(9) In 1921, Babu Amarendranath Roy, a well-known Bengali writer, wrote an article in Jaista number of the now-defunct Bengali weekly "Basanti" under the caption: Bānglār Ādi Nātyakār, where he gives in Bengali the first portion of Mr. Bucklands' account.

Mr. Roy does not claim to be the first writer in Bengali on Lebedeff, though Mr. Banerji had on a previous occasion dubbed him as such*; nor the article shows much original research; but this much is certain that his (Mr. Roy's) account, accurate as it is, has a great literary value and for the first time he gives in Bengali an account about the first performance in Bengali, enacted as early as in 1795. He, however, does not speak anything about the female artists.

Thus, though different casual writers made occasional references about Lebedeff, our historians of the Bengali literature were significantly silent about Lebedeff, although we expected one like Dr. Susil Kumar De, (who is said to have been in possession of a copy of Lebedeff's Grammar) to have referred about him in his "History of the Bengali Literature" published in 1919. Again though

* V de [illegible] Baisak, 1339 B S.

his attention was drawn to this absence of Lebedeff's name in his treatise, by a letter from Sir George dated June 11, 1920, we again find no mention of Lebedeff in his later writings published in 1921, or after, until Sir GeorgeGrierson's article was published in the Calcutta Review of Oct. 1923. The first instalment we get in an article in Indian Historical Quarterly Nov. 1925 and that too does not enlighten us any further; but of this we shall speak here-after.

Let us now reproduce the "preface" from Lebedeff's Grammar as was quoted by Dr. Grierson in Oct. 1923 in the "Calcutta Review" :—

"After these researches into Indian languages and literatures, I translated two English dramatic pieces namely "The Disguise" and "Love is the Best Doctor" into the Bengali language, and having observed that the Indians preferred mimicry and drollery to plain grave solid sense, however purely expressed—I therefore fixed on those plays and which were most pleasing, filled up with a group of watchmen chokey-dars; savoyards, *Canera*; thieves ghoonia; law-yers, Gomasta and amongst the rest a corps of petty plunderers.

"When my translation was published, I invited several learned Pundits who perused the work very attentively and "I then had the opportunity of observing those sentences which appeared to the Pandits most pleasing and which excited emotion and I presume I do not flatter much when I affirm that by this translation the spirit of both the comic and serious scenes were much heightened and which would in vain be imitated by a European who did not possess the advantage of *s ch an*

instructor as I had the extraordinary good fortune to procure.

"After the approbation of the Pandits—Golok Nath Das, my linguist, made me a proposal that if I chose to present this play publicly, he would engage to supply me with *actors of both sexes from among the* natives with which idea I was exceedingly pleased. I, therefore, to bring to view my undertaking for the benefit of the European public without delay, solicited the Governor-Generol—Sir John Shore (Now Lord Teignmouth) for a regular licence, who granted it to me without hesitation.

"Thus fortified by patronage and anxious to exhibit I set about building a commodious Theatre on a plan of my own in Doomtolla (Dome—Lane) in the centre of Calcutta; and in the meanwhile I employed my linguist to procure the native actors of both sexes in three months and I had both Theatre and actors ready for my presentation of the 'Disguise' which I accordingly produced to the public in the Bengali language on the 27th November 1795 and the same play was again performed on the 21st March 1796."

"Now the first and second representation both of which attracted an overflowing house, I obtained full permission to perform both English and Bengali plays: and from the encouragement shown to me by the Honourable Governer General and other patrons and friends, during my pursuit in the searches of Indian Literature viz the Sanskrit and Bengali languages, the mixed Indian Dialects [i.e. Hindostani] Chronology Astronomy etc. and having during the course of any application and study

discovered numerous faults and errors which those who had published in those hands had fallen into, I resolved on giving to the impartial public the fruits of my enquiries and pursuits and therefore quitted India to come to this country for the purpose of publishing the same to public view.*

Dr. Grierson did not stop here short, simply by quoting the preface, but invited the Indian scholars to pursue investigations and find out :—

(1) Corroborations of the materials in the preface from contemporary records, if any.

(2) Ascertain if there are any traces of "Theatre" in Doomtolla.

(3) Where is Doomtolla Lane?

(4) Is there any trace of Golok Das?

Now let us see how our research-scholars have responded to his call :—

1. In the next issue *i.e.*, in November 1923 of the same journal ("Calcutta Review"), Prof. Sailendra Nath Mitra, M.A. referred to Babu Amarendra Nath Roy's article in the "Basanti" and quoted the second portion from Buckland's biography which was absent in Roy's article.

(2) In *January, 1924* of the same review in his article "The Bengali Theatre," Mr. Shyama Prosad Mukherji, a worthy son of the late Sir Ashutosh Mukherji, referred concisely to Lebedeff, evidently with the details

* Dr. P. Guha Thakurta wrote that the book was published by Sir George Grierson, which is evidently a mistake The book was published by the author himself, 122 years before Sir George quoted from the preface in 1923.

he got from Grierson's article, and the same was published in the form of a book. After Dr. Grierson Mr. Mukherji was the first writer to have referred to Lebedeff.

(3) 'The Bengali Stage' by the present writer was then in the stage of preparation and Dr. Grierson's article in the "Calcutta Review" gave a fresh stimulus to work for the untrodden path. The only paper of the time of Lebedeff was the "Calcutta Gazette" and from the issues of the Gazette of 5th and 25th November, 1795 and 10th and 17th and 24th March, 1796, we got a number of details which was published in the form of an article in the "Forward" of September 7th 1924, (Bhadra 1331) and repeated in the Bengali Journal "Rup O Ranga" in 1331 (18th Aswin 3rd Oct 1924).

(4) The above article was so much appreciated by the contemporary journals that the "Nautch Ghar" and "Sisir" published of their own accord the translations of it.

(5) And the two well-known magazines "Modern Review" and "Prabashi" edited by Sj. Ramananda Chatterjee made timely references to the same.

(6) Next appeared in "Nautch Ghar" (Dt. 13th Aghran 1331 28th Oct. 1924) an article by Prof. Amulya Charan Vidyabhusan who, chronologically two months after the references were given by us, quoted verbatim the contents of the 'Calcutta Gazette' of those dates; and Prof. Vidyabhusan's discussion was scholarly.

(7) Dr. S. K. De then appeared in the field for the first time with his article in the "Indian Historical Quarterly" in November 1925 but here too he made errors which we shall deal later on.

(8) There was lull over it for a number of years. Next, Babu Abinash Chandra Ganguly, the worthy author of "Grish Chandra," in 1927 in his book mad references to the discussion between Prof. Vidyabhusan and the present writer.

(9) We next noticed an English treatise, withou any original research, from the pen of Dr. P. Guh Thakurta in which he quoted from Mr. S. P. Mukherjee's book and the present writer's articles about Lebedeff.

(10) Some articles in "Liberty" of 16th and 23r March of 1931 were then published to point out th inaccuracies that occur in Dr. Guha's book.

(11) Two months after this, appeared of Dr. S. K De's article in the "Modern Review" (vide page 545 May 1931) in which he rather mercilessly criticise Doctor Guha.

But besides telling us that there is a quotation o the title page of the Grammar from Vidyasundar, Dr. D adds nothing further.

(12) Then appeared an article in English i "Modern Review" on November 1931 about the sam Lebedeff by Mr. Brojendra Nath Banerjee in which h quotes verbatim the contents of the issue of the "Calcutt Gazette" 5th, 26th November, 1795 and 10th March 1796 as Prof. Vidyabhusan did eight years ago. Ther is, however, a strange coincidence between the quotation of both these gentlemen, as we find the incidents of th 17th March 1796 absent in both the writings, thoug there are much worth stating informations in the Gazett of that date. After that we have seen a book of M

Banerji which too does not mention anything about the advertisement of the 17th March.

"WHO WAS LEBEDEFF"

Heresim Lebedeff, a Russian adventurer, said to be an ukraine peasant, took part in a Russian embassy to Naples in 1775. He visited Paris and London and came to Madras as a bandmaster and left for Calcutta in August 1787. Both at Madras and Calcutta, he was greatly appreciated for his skill in his performance on the violincelle, as we find in the Calcutta gazette of 1788, 31st July:—"Mr. Lebedeff's great professional merit in the musical walk has long since been admitted by those of his acquaintances at this settlement and at Madras before whom he had frequent opportunities of displaying his performance on the violincelle. In the dearth of public amusements we think it will give pleasure by an anticipation of Mr. Lebedeff's intention of notifying very shortly a Bill of Fare for one night's musical repast and which we understand will consist of the united assistance of the first vocal and instrumental powers in settlement. It therefore cannot fail of proving a "bonus bonche" to all lovers of harmony and to the promoters of such an elegant amusement."

At Calcutta, he now and again arranged benefit performances which, besides filling his pocket, supplied much of the public entertainments here. We find a similar notice in the issue of the "Calcutta Gazette" of August 21, 1788:—

"A very numerous audience honoured Mr. Lebedeff's benefit on Monday evening Of the severa excellent

performances which furnished the entertainment the "Focund Rebeck's Found" gave the most universal delight. "From Rofy Bowers" did not draw tears down Pluto's "Iron cheek" but received a much more flattering compliment in turning "the cheek of bounty pale" by the pathetic sweetness with which it was sung."

Lebedeff seems to have made some money out of these performances at Calcutta where he stayed at 47, Tirettibazar, as the "Calcutta Gazette" shows :—

"Lebedeff next fixed the 9th April 1790 for his vocal and instrumental music which is to be performed at the Old Court House where he respectfully hopes for their patronage and support.

"Tickets Rupees Twelve each to be had of Lebedeff at his house 47, Tirettibazar at the publishing house of Messrs, Cooper and Upjhon and at the Old Court House."

Lebedeff next removed to No. 3 Weston Lane.

"Calcutta Gazette" 13th December, 1792

THE SITE OF THE BENGALI THEATRE

Lebedeff next mentions in the preface to his "Grammar" :—"Thus fortified by patronage and anxious to exhibit, I set about building a commodious theatre on a plan of my own in Dom (Tollah) Lane in the centre of Calcutta." *

But where this place was?

Dr. Guha is in a mist, and Dr. De is equally in darkness. On a reference, however, to A. Up-John's map of

* Vide page 227 Supra.

1792 A.D, (A copy of which may be found on the reading desk of the Imperial Library) and also from earlier maps, we find that Doomtola is a lane located between the Chitpore Road and Chinabazar Lane. It shoots off from Radhabaza or Chinabazar Lane just to the east of the present Pollock Street and became Doomtola Street in Schalch's map of 1825 and the identical place is indicated as the Ezra Street in the recent maps of Calcutta in 1852 and 1885. Readers would therefore be surprised to hear from Dr. De "that the locality of Doomtola has not been identified."* "It is either" thus proceeds the Doctor, "a street off Chinabazar Street or the name of a lane at the opening of Kansaitola, or what is left of the Bentinck Street."

How could Domtola become Kansaitola unless there is a link between the Domes and Kansains, is a mystery. Dr. De's further ignorance is more amazing. The "Calcutta Gazette" further points out to No. 25 Domtola, where Lebedeff's new theatre ("Bengally Theatre") was decorated in the Bengali style, but Dr. De would not believe us and without turning over the pages of the Gazette, at once attacks the writer of "Rup O Ranga"† as an "Unknown writer" "erring predecessor" and "person who led Dr. Guho blind-fold to fresh errors." These are Dr. De's opinion which affects none but his compeers, to find that one of them enjoying official recognition for academic distinction, would simply betray his ignorance by his surprise : "but where on earth the writer of the Rup-o-Ranga got the exact description of 25 Domtola Lane is a mystery."‡ The Doctor is referred to various

* Dr. De's article in 'Indian Historical Quarterly' November 1925.
† Our article in Rup O Rango, Aswin, 1331 B.S.
‡ Modern Review May 1931 page 541

maps of Calcutta lying in the Imperial Library and to the issues of the "Calcutta Gazette" of 20th November, 1795 and 10th and 17th March, 1796.

It is here worth-while to mention that we have been several times to the locality and we think 21 Ezra Street, or a little to the east where the American church now stands may be taken as the probable site of the Bengali Theatre. People of the locality stilll call that place as "Natchghar." Time could not obliterate popular memory and the place is still associated with amusements, the "Central Theatre" at the Chitpore Road being just to the east of it.

DRAMAS AND DATES OF PERFORMANCES

The preface in Lebedeff's Grammar mentions two dramas viz "Disguise" and "Love is the best Doctor." On a reference to the Calcutta Gazette of the 5th and of 25th November, we find that the first night of performance was Friday the 27th November 1795; and that the "New Theatre in Doomtola" opened on that day precisely at 8 o'clock with a comedy called "The Disguise". There is no other mention of any other drama besides the aforesaid one. Both the stage and auditorium were "decorated in the Bengali style and the play commenced with vocal and instrumental music called "The Indian Serenade" and to this a few European musical instruments were also added. Some poetical pieces of the famous Bengali poet Bharat Chandra Roy Gunākor were set to music and amusing curiosities were introduced between the acts. A detailed synopsis of the performance was supplied to the audience."

Calcutta Gaz—5th Nov 1795

From the advertisement portions of the Calcutta Gazette of the 10th and 17 March of 1796, we further find that the presentation of the Bengali play was fixed for Monday the 21st March 1796. No name has been mentioned in this connection, but from the expressions like "second representation" and "Bengali Play", we infer that the second performance of "Disguise" was meant. From the wordings in the advertisements, "the account of the Plot and scenes of the Dramas", we may consider that possibly more than one play was staged. We have, however, no copy of the synopsis and are not in a position to definitely assert from contemporaneous records whether "Love is the Best Doctor" was staged along with "Disguise."

THE ARTISTS.

The diary mentions about Goluk Das having secured native actors of both sexes. The Calcutta Gazette of the 5th November 1795 also mentions "The characters to be supported by performers of both sexes." There is, however, nothing surprising in it, and Lebedeff did not like to go behind the times. Mrs. Bristow's name was in the lips of every European of the settlement and the Calcutta Theatre was then in its full reputation with artists of both sexes. In Bengal, however, we do not find our public theatres employing actresses till 1873 though in 1833 an attempt was made by Babu Nabin Krishna Bose of Shambazar in his house where some women appeared in the performance of Vidyasunder.

PRICES OF ADMISSION.

We have already mentioned the prices in the Calcutta

Theatre. They were no doubt high. Lebedeff reduced the price and announced for the first night, "Tickets to be had at the theatre, boxes and pit at sicca Rs. 8 and Gallery sicca Rupees four."

Calcutta Gazette 26th Nov. 1795.

It appears that there was a tremendous rush and the "subscribers" elbowed their way at the gate. It was a novelty both to the English and the Bengali audience and we are thankful to this Russian adventurer for the first endeavours in the Bengali Play.

On the second night Lebedeff, for the better accommodation of the audience limited the number of subscribers to 200 charging one gold mohur, which was valued at 40s. at the time, uniformly for each ticket— (*Calcutta Gazette March 10, 1796.*)

It was announced on the same day that the number was nearly completed and it was particularly mentioned on the 17th March that no money would be received at the door, nor anybody to be admitted without a ticket and no application for tickets which was to be made personally to Mr. Lebedeff would be received after the 19th i.e. two days before the performance.

It appears from the arrangement that all the tickets (fetching Lebedeff a decent sum) were disposed of, some days before the performance.

The number of audience was mostly Europeans and Lebedeft by the next issue of the Calcutta Gazette dated the 24th March 1796 unlike his previous occasion "respectfully" acknowledges "very distinguished patronage" of the ladies and gentlemen of the settlement and of the subscribers to his second Bengali Play who

honoured him by their "patronage" and begged leave to assure them of his "most grateful sense of the very liberal support" accorded to him on that occasion, and he "intreats" that they will be pleased to accept his "warmest thanks." The preface, too, mentions about "both the representations having attracted an overflowing house."

Lebedeff, as we have seen, took great interest for the amusement of the European community and for the success of his undertaking he sought and obtained the patronage of the Governor General. Next, he was granted permission to perform both English and Bengali plays, but he was soon drawn to a work of greater interest which induced him to give up theatrical pusuits and leave *"for submitting the fruits of his labours to public view"*—

Mr. Buckland however tells us that after these performances he was made the theatrical manager to the great Mogul and finally returned to England in 1801, in which year he published the Grammar. In the Russian foreign office, through Warowz, the Russian ambassador he was given a large subvention towards founding at St. Petersburg the "Imperimerie Indienne" a Sanskrit Press: He died after 1815.

Thus the beginning of the First Bengali Drama came from a foreigner. There is nothing to be ashamed of at this. Even the beginning of such an august assembly as the British Parliament came from the initiative of a foreigner. We have already observed how the ancient Hindu Drama began to decline and at last died out during the Mahomedan Rule. Lebedeff's attempt was the

beginning of the first glorious revival of the Hindu stage. Much credit is, however, due to Goluk Nath Das who contributed so largely to Lebedeff's success. We tried our best to gather, if possible, some information about Goluk Das, but we failed. He was very likely the author of "Hitopadesh" as Sir George hints. We regret we have no knowledge of this unknown worker, but every lover of Drama will remember his name in grateful love. All honour to the Bengali pioneer!

OTHER ENGLISH THEATRES

After the closing of the Bengali Theatre, or Lebedeff's New Theatre at Doomtolla, some other theatres of more or less ephemeral nature cropped up, and of them the following are worth-mentioning :—

1. The *Chandernagore Theatre of* 1808. On one occasion in this theatre on the 4th April 1808, night when the farce L Afocat was being played, and when the village French Judge was busy on the stage with the trial of a shepherd who had stolen some healthy sheep of his master with the wool of which both he and his master used to have superfine English cloth made, the watch of the stage-manager was found missing and suspicion fell upon one of the scene-shifters. He at once took the man in a very excited state to the manager who was then upon the stage acting the part of Judge. A few questions were put by the manager; then the judge with the utmost gravity made the man to confess his guilt and to fall flat at his feet. He was reprimanded by the manager, warned for his conduct, and the man also promised to be honest in future This life-like on was greatly enjoyed by everybody Its

performances were noticed in the Calcutta Gazette of 1808.

2. THE ATHENEUM 1812

The above-mentioned theatre was opened a little down the Portuguese Church at 18, Circular Road on the 30th March 1812 under the name of the "Atheneum"; the performances enacted that night were "Earl of Essex" and the farce, "Raising the wind."

Each ticket was priced one gold Mohur.

3. The Kidderpore Theatre of 1815.

The farce of "The Lying Valet" was performed on the 28th August, 1815.

It was a short-lived stage and nothing particular is known about it.

4. The Dum Dum Theatre of 1817.

This theatre was at first not quite well-known in the locality, but it was brought to public notice by Charles Franklin, a Bombardier attached to the second battery of the Artillery. He was a versatile actor. On his being posted at Dum Dum, he joined the Thespian Band of the Dum Dum Theatre, and by his versatile talents and with the help of his officers and others, he was soon able to raise the character of the performances to a very high standard. On the 25th August, 1824 Mr. Franklin passed away from this world.—

Carey's Good Old Days.

On April 10, 1826, it commanded a crowded house of respectable audience due to its excess to witness the novelty of representation of "Fountainbeau" by gentlemen amateurs. Those who came to witness the performance

had the satisfaction of seeing their highest expectations fulfilled.

"The part of 'Lockland' was entrusted to a young amateur whose wonderfully effective representation of that character at once marked him out as a finished actor. It was an all round success. There was nothing left for the most fastidious critic to desire for.

"Next to "Lockland", was La Poche, the French Tailor. In his habits, carriage and speech, he was exceedingly amusing and true to nature, and whenever he appeared, the "most resolved muscles instantly relaxed inspite of themselves."

"The hearty jolly hostess of the English Lion, Mrs Casey, was most happily represented by one of the amateurs. The part was by no means wanting in what the critics call 'breadth'.

"Tallyho" got very brilliantly through his part and gave the sporting squire to the life. He was good throughout, but his introduction of Lockland and colonel Epanlette to each of other was intimately so :—

"Colonel, this here is 'squire' what d'ye call his squire, that there is colonel Thing-o-me and how you know one another, shake fists." This was done in genuine imitable Yorkshire style.

"The part of colonel Epanlette was in the hands of a gentleman who did every justice to the Anglo French officer of the old regime. His dress, attitude and pronunciation were all excellent. Sir John Bull was a very respectable and natural actor. He afforded most amusement in the scenes with Lockland "the vulgar simplicity

of the one," and "the polished assurance of the other" forming an exquisite contract. The little "Lord Winlove how to do" was well done. Can it be surprising, considering how well he was supported by the beautiful and most graceful Rosal, really this lady is quite beyond all praise.

"Lady Bull, judging from the great applause with which her performance was received, appeared a favourite. Considering that she only appeared between eight and nine feet high, it was astonishing how gracefully she acquitted herself.

"Miss Dolly Bull was represented by her usual spirit and truth to nature, by an actress who almost deprives the critic of his vocation by putting it out of his power to find fault. She left nothing to be desired for the part, it was quite perfect. She is truly a fascinating actress and while we have her ought to value her, as she deserves, and give her encouragement."

India Gazette April 13, 1826.

This best and leading actress was no other than Mrs. Esther Leach. She was a young artist of versatile talents and was considered as Mrs. Siddons of Bengal. We shall in due place follow her career at some length. A benefit performance was given to her on April 1826, after which she was taken to Calcutta by the promoters of the Chowringhee Theatre.

In October 1826, some repairs were made that considerably improved the condition of the theatre. The gallery which was the subject of much annoyance to the boxes was entirely removed and the Pit much extended. The theatre consequently afforded more accommodation than it did before Thus altered, the Dum Dum Theatre

re-opened in Jan. 1826 with the pieces "Wags of Windsor" and "Bombastes Furioso"

Calcutta Gazette, January 11, 1827.

The Institution was long a place of attraction for lovers of the drama, but in the course of a few years the Theatre began to decline and we quote below a contemporaneous description by an anonymous writer:—

"Dum Dum in the best days has boasted performers sufficiently attractive to bring an audience from Calcutta but it has shared in the general depression of the Theatrical poverty. Few stars illumine its declining glories and the once crowded *parterre* exhibits a beggarly account of empty benches."

"Asiatic Journal Jan. 1834, Page 25, Vol. XXIII."

There was a theatre in Wheler Place whose audiences were extremely select as will appear from the "Canton" published in the *Calcutta Gazette of Feb. 23, 1797* :—

"A certain person who made her appearance amongst the company in the auditory on the first night of the performance is desired to take notice that in future she will not be permitted to remain in the house should she be so ill-advised as to repeat her visit."

The locality formed a part of what is now the Government Place West, though running in a transverse direction and from it issued a lane called Corkshrew Lane which led to Fancy, or more correctly Phansi—(hanging) lane as it was the place of execution.

On Friday the 5th May 1797, "Catherine and Petruchio," a comedy in 3 acts, as altered by Garrick from Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew" was performed, along with a farce "The Mogul Tale"

1798—9th Jan. "Irishman in London," 22nd Jan.—"The Agreeable Surprise," were performed.

On January 18, 1824, at Drummond's Academy in Dharmatalla, Homes' tragedy "Doglus" was performed by the lads and one of their number, an East Indian boy of 14 by the name Henry De Rozio who afterwards acquired great celebrity as a teacher, a journalist and as a poet, recited the prologue composed by him for that occasion.

De Rozio is an undying name in the political history of Bengal After Raja Rammohan Roy, it was his pupils that were the pioneers in the political field of Bengal.

THE BAITAKKHANA THEATRE.

The above named theatre was opened at 117 Baitakkhana Road in or about 1827. The place was called Baitakkhana from an old Banyan tree which stood there and that afforded a resting place, or Baitakkhana, to merchants and traders who traded with Calcutta and whose caravans rested under its shade. Job Charnock is said to have selected the site of Calcutta for a city, for the delightful pleasure he found in smoking his pipe, sitting under the shadow of this large tree. This tree stood till 1870.

We find from an advertisement of the Baitakkhana Theatre, dated the 14th May 1827 announcing a performance of 'The Young Widow or Lesson for Lovers' and of a farce, called 'My Landlady's Gown', to be held on the 24th for the benefit of Mrs. Bland. The hour for the commencement of the performance was half-past seven an inconvenient hour in those days.

Mrs. Cohen seems to have been the principal attraction at the Baitakkhana Theatre.

Asiatic Journal of May 1826, contains the following:—

"The amateurs of Baitakkhana Theatre of late attempted some startling comedies, and the success which has crowned their exertions evidently shows that their talents are by no means inadequate to the task."

IN THE PERFORMANCE OF "POOR GENTLEMAN."

"The character of Lieutenant Worthington, the hero of the play, was sustained with great credit; the dignity, the honourable feelings and the passive firmness of a true gentleman even under the influence of chill penury were well portrayed."

THE FENWICK PLACE THEATRE.

The above named theatre was somewhat of a primitive type. It was situated in a matted Bunglow. That it was spacious is clear from the number of spectators it could accommodate. The house was airy and open—so much so, that the interior was visible from the street. These were no doubt commendable features for a Summer Theatre, especially in the East.

Next came in importance the Chowringhee Theatre started in 1813, which exercised such a great influence upon the people of Calcutta, that two theatres organised and controlled by the Bengalees were soon started: The Hindu Theatre by Babu Prosanna Kumar Tagore, and the other, Nabin Krishna Bose's Theatre for the performance of the "Vidya Sundar" The Chowringhee

Theatre and The Sans Souci Theatre were greatly instrumental to the Bengali enterprise in the theatrical line, culminating afterwards in the establishment of the Belgachia permanent stage. We shall give a detailed account of these theatres in the proper place.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHOWRINGEE THEATRE.

The Play-house that exercised a great influence over the educated Bengalees and inspired them with the idea of having a stage of their own, was the famous Chowringee Theatre, already alluded to in our former chapter. If any public Theatre can ever boast of its connection with a galaxy of brillint scholars, artists and men of lead and light, belonging to the west, and having an intimate connection with the Indian people, it was the Chowringee Theatre. Some names are immortal in the annals of Bengal and the chief amongst them are :—

(1) .. .Captain D. L. Richardson of undying fame, who was professor of English in the well-known Hindu College of Calcutta. The name of this famous scholar is for ever associated with the literary history of Bengal Of his famous students, the names of the great Bengali poet, Michæl Madhusudan Dutt, and of the famous educationists, Bhudev Mukherji and Rajnarayan Bose stand foremost. In fact, he was the beau ideal of his pupils As De Rozio's writings and political bias urged his students into politics and free thinking, so Richardson's teachings encouraged his pupils in literary pursuits and fine arts. Hardly a greater Shakesperean scholar has ever come over to India. His reading of S was quite astonishing, as if different

persons were acting different parts, about which Lord Macaulay in admiration exclaimed "I can forget everything of India, but not of your reading of Shakespeare." Such was the celebrated Professor who strongly felt that stage was the only proper place for learning the art of reciting or reading correctly, and for this he often urged his students to attend theatres and even occasionally supplied them with tickets. The establishment of the Hindu Theatre, as we shall see, owes much to his influence.

(2) Another celebrity was Dr. Horace Haymen Wilson, an eminent Sanskrit Scholar and author of several important sanskrit publications—who married a grand daughter of Mrs. Siddons, the famous English actress. He greatly encouraged and patronised the establishment of the Hindu Theatre and we find from the proceedings of the second annual meeting of the proprietors of the Chowringhee Theatre that unanimous thanks were accorded to Mr. H. H. Wilson "for the valuable support he had given to the theatre from the very beginning."

Besides these two great scholars, there were other notable gentlemen there :—

(3) ....Henry Meredith Parker of the Bengal Civil Service, sometimes Secretary and then a Member, the Board of Revenue. He was not only a zealous officer, but an accomplished musician, a capital actor, a versatile writer and an ardent advocate of public liberty. He had been amongst the warmest supporters of Buckingham's Calcutta Journal, when to do so was highly risky for service, and then lent all the weight of his ability to uphold the liberal policy of Lord William Bentinck He

wrote one or two farces, e.g "Amateurs", and was called by his friends and admirers 'Proteus' from the readiness with which he adapted himself to all the changes of 'many coloured life' as presented on the stage.

(4) .. ..Mr. J. H. Stocqueller, editor of "John Bull," which was afterwards changed by him into "Englishman"—was an amateur who took a great interest in theatre. While in England, he was often "privileged to go behind the scenes at Drury Lane", often "noticed by Sheridian," introduced by him to Lord Byron and once had a peep at Mrs. Siddons in Lady Macbeth ; even the great actor, Edmund Keen often encouraged him to become an actor. He was certainly an acquisition to the Chowringee Theatre. He was often cast for Cassius, Iago, Pizzaro, Sir John Falstaff and Moliere's Tartuffe.

(5). .... .Sir J. P. Grant—(Not the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal) a judge of the Bombay High Court, who owing to some difference with Lord Ellenbrough (then in Bombay) resigned his office, rather than allowing its independence to be tampered with.

He afterwards came to Calcutta to practise at the bar and took keen interest in theatres and Calcutta society.

6. William Linton, the favourite vocalist of his day and organist of St. John's Cathedral, was well-known in the character of Julius Ceaser, and was sometimes the lessee of the Chowringee theatre.

7. George Chinery—the eminent artist who painted many pictures in Calcutta.

8. Thomas Alsop—Magistrate of Ca cutta J C

Doyle, Military Secretary to Lord Hastings was inimitable in Irish Characters.

9. Captain W. D. Playfair had no equal as Falstaff. there was, as if, hilarity in the very sound of his voice.

10. Captain George Augustus Fredeiick Fitz Clarence (a son of King William III) was an Aid-de-camp to Marquis of Hastings, and was afterwards created Earl of Munster by his father. During his stay in Calcutta, he was in close connection with the Chowringee Theatre.

The Chowringee Theatre. or "the Private subscription Theatre", as it was first called, was built on a commodious structure in the year 1813, in the southern part of Calcutta on Chowringee Road, to the south west corner of a Street which owing to its association with this theatre is still called "Theatre Road", as distinguished from "Theatre Street", which was the name given to the lane behind the "Writers' Buildings" for its proximity to the "Calcutta Theatre" The whole site between Chowringee Road and Elysiam Row (Now Lord Sinha Road) was occupied by the Chowringee theatre. The adjacent house to the north was known as Ballards' Place, (Vide Schalch's Plan of Calcutta 1825). It now stands to the west of the Victoria Memorial Hall and South of the King's Court at Theatre Road. Sir William Markby lived here from 1866 to 1877 and aferwards it was converted into a boarding establishment. The expenses of the construction and the cost of the materials for the stage were borne by a number of gentlemen subscribing amongst themselves the shares of Rs. 100 each

It was beautifully crowned with a dome, but Mr Stocqueler who had seen much of London Theatres

called it "a clumsy old edifice at Chowringee—the fashionable quarter of Calcutta." A correct idea of it may, however, be gathered from a contemporary writer of the Asiatic Journal who describes it as "the proud neighbour of the Dum-Dum in Chowringee, which boasts little of outward architectural display, though its interior is both handsome and commodious."*

Lord Moyra who took charge of the Government in October 1813 at once extended his patronage to the Theatre, made liberal contributions to it, and opened the Theatre in November 25th of the same year. The Governor General was present with his wife—Lady Hastings, and the address, presented to him on the occasion, along with two other addresses has been reproduced in Oxberry's Actors' Budget (Cal. 1824.) Their excellencies took lively interest in the Theatre and often graced its performances by their presence, some of which are worth noting, e.g., Henry IV on 1814, 23rd July; Merry Wives of Windsor on 25th Sept. 1818 (Friday); "the Sleeping Draught" on 24th June 1819; "West India" on 23rd July 1819.

Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer", was played as a benefit performance for the Free School on the 13th May 1814 and about Rs. 3600 raised (expenses amounting to Rs. 1500). An actor in the character of Marlow recited the following lines composed by him as an address of welcome to Lord Moyra :—

Vain is the hope and fruitless the endeavour
To gain without alloy the general favour
All causes of compliment or blame to show

* A. J 1834 Jan. Page 25

And please the many while offending none,
And arduous is the post to him assigned
Who seeks to satisfy the public mind.

Cal. Gazette 19th May, 1814.

Their Excellencies the Governor General Lord Moyra and Lady Loudon, the Chief justice, Lady East and all the principal families of the settlement graced the occasion with their presence and about 300 persons, the cream of the society, were there. A splendid Drop-scene was presented by Mr. Hume, a barrister practising in the Calcutta High Court, but unfortunately as it was not quite dry, its exhibition was necessarily postponed till the next performance of Macbeth. The audience, including their Excellencies were highly delighted by the show—especially for the costumes that were quite in keeping with the dramatic characters and events, and the Ale-House scene was indeed admirable.

Calcutta Gazette May, 1814.

The same keen interest was evinced by Lord Amherst the next Governor General, his wife and the members of his Council and we mention amongst others a particular occasion when their Excellencies Lord and Lady Amherst, Lord Combermere, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John Campbell, were present on the 25th April to witness the performance of "Pizzaro". The orchestra struck up the National Anthem and the Manager "the father of our Drury" read an address appropriate to the occasion. *A. J. 1827.*

The company failed not to enlist the patronage of even Lord William Bentinck who took not much interest in theatre, but along with the Hon'ble judges of the High

Court and the Commander-in-Chief graced the house by his presence in a performance of the "Iron Chest" when the gentleman who acted the part of Wilford, gave as an entertainment "the reminiscenes of an actor."

(A J. Feb. 1830).

Fortified with the distinguished patronage of the highest officials of the Settlement, the "Chowringhee Theatre" continued till May 1839, and was in its zenith of fame during the years 1826-1832. The tickets were priced as: Box Sicca Rs. 12/-, Pit Rs. 8/-, but afterwards reduced to Rs. 8 and Rs 6 respectively. Performances were at first held on Thursday-night and afterwards changed into Friday night. Doors were opened at 6 P.M. The curtain generally used to fall at 11 P.M and sometimes at half-past Ten. On one occasion when the budget was long and continued up to 12 o'clock, a large number of the audience out of tedium left before the curtain fell Generally the number of spectators varied from 200 to 300.*

The actors, we have already seen, were generally amateurs, but actresses received their pay and lived in the premises of the Theatre. some of these talented women deserve special notice. Gardall Atkinson was extremely popular with the Calcutta audience till death removed her all on a sudden in 1837 ; Mrs. Mary Gotlieb (wife of Valentine Gotltieb, the mechanist of the Theatre) whose place on her death in August 1827 at Chinsura, was taken by one Mrs. Kelly, Mrs. Bland, Mrs. Francis who stayed till the Theatre was closed, Mrs. Chester (with her husband) and last not the least Mrs. Esther Leach,

---

* Gazette 30th Dec. 1813, 28th Jan 1 h May 1814 20th Aug. 1815.

who was known as Mrs. Siddons of Bengal, were prominent in public eye.

Mrs. Leach, the daughter of Mr. Flatman, an English soldier, was born in the year 1809 She was married to a non-commissioned officer, John Leach, a widower, who was senior to her by 17 years and her reputation as an actress at the Dum Dum Theatre spread even to Calcutta. The Chowringee Theatre, under the patronage of Lord Amherst, succeeded in inducing her to accept an engagement there, and along with her appointment got her husband transferred to Fort William as the Garrison Serjeant Major in the year 1826. She was a highly gifted woman, and she learnt everything about the histrionic art herself She was the most popular actress on the stage, and Mr Stocqueler in his Hand Book on India (1844) spoke of her in his reminiscenes that "Mrs. Leach was for talents and personal attractions without a rival even in England. Extremely pretty, highly intelligent, modest, amiable and possessing a musical voice and good taste, she adapted herself to all the acquirements of the drama. The ingenue soulbrette, of the leading plays as "Othello", "the Wife", the "Hunchback" and the "Lady of the Lyons", the highest flights in comedy, the pantomimic action "La Muette" and some minor parts in Italian opera.........were all alike to this clever child ot nature." She received a moderate education, but had a natural aptitude for getting pieces by heart. The soldiers selected her, when she was a mere child, to play Tom Thumb and Little Pickle. Even then the officers were charmed by her powers and got their adjutant to present her a copy of Shakespeare and since then she became a devotee of that immortal poet, and devoured everything in the shape of dramatic poetry and prose which she came by in her

way. While she appeared as Lady Teazle in July 1827, the same John Bull wrote of her "we cannot speak in terms sufficiently her due......suffice to say, we do think her one of the best female performers we have ever seen on the boards." She was so much identified with the Chowringee Theatre that its fortunes changed with her own. During the seven years from 1826 to 1832, the Theatre had its best days, she was able to give her individual attention to it, after which as the affairs took an unsatisfactory turn, the scale of her fortune turned also in the opposite direction. Her husband died in the year 1836; and she was keeping an indifferent health from some time before. In the next year, she became so ill that she could not attend the theatre, and was advised to return to England for a change. Her last appearance at the Chowringee was on January 12th. 1838. When at her farewell she recited a rhymed address embodying the corroding word... . "farewell", it touched everyone of the audience with deep sorrow. Her misfortunes cast a deep gloom upon the Calcutta stage, and with Mrs. Leach set the sun of the Chowringee Theatre.

As we have mentioned before, the accounts of the Theatre Company were placed every year in the meeting of the proprietors and we find the following from the account of 1825-1826 :—

"Total receipts in the year excluding money drawn upon account amounts to 8442 rupees total expenses to Rs. 8356-9 : leaving a balance of Rs. 85-13 as in favour of the year on the other hand ; we have an interest, account with Alexender etc at 8 p.c. amounting to Rs. 881-2-10 and net expense of the year to the proprietors is, therefore

Rs. 795-5-6 making the debt due to the house Rs. 10122- To discharge this debt it was stipulated with Mr. Richardson in the chair at the Town Hall meeting that proprietors should be levied Rs. 100/- for each share, and Rs. 50 - for each share more than one, and that Mr. Linton who was the lessee to continue his lease and Mr. Princep be requested to take entire management of the pecuniary interest, and that free admission of the proprietors shall be relinquished for two performances at such seasons as Mr. Linton may select in the course of the year, on condition of his paying to his proprietors the annual sum of Rs. 1600 -."

A. J. January, 1827.

Afterwards the Theatre began to improve by securing the services of well-known artists, and repairs were made in the building. Plays were highly spoken of and they always commanded a crowded house. But from 1833-1834 its affairs again took an unsatisfactory turn. In 1833, the Theatre was leased to an Italian Company at a nightly rent of Rs. 100/- and it showed some signs of improvement in the beginning as was noticed in the *Bengal Hurkaru Feb, 2 : 1833* —·

"We are glad to find that so far from the days of our Calcutta Drury being numbered, it is rising from the temporary prostration with a giant's strength and will re-open on the 4th, with attractions which with perhaps the exception of the first performances of Pizzaro has never been equalled. Lord Byron, when he wrote his first satire, declared that all mankind were still black and blue with crushing to see Cataline in pantaloons : and we shall be

* Vide also A. J Aug 33

much mistaken if a similar complaint could not be brought against the general curiosity of Calcutta on the first introduction of the Italian opera on the boards of the "Chowringee Theatre".

The Italian Company, however, for want of popular support, which it had expected to get by the high attractions of the Italian Operas, was unable to pay the high rent and the theatre was leased to the French Company at Rs. 50/- per night, which too began to fall in arrears every month. The proprietors, therefore, themselves began to manage the theatre and reduced the prices to six rupees per boxes and rupees three for pit. No doubt there was an increase in audience on the reduction of the prices, but the Hurkara * rightly found out the true cause of its down fall, and it commented thus in one of its articles, about "the puritanic spirit, hostile to all refined and intellectual recreation without any parallel in any community since the time of the Commonwealth". Unable to clear debts running up to Rs. 20739/- and make further progress, the proprietors settled on August 3, 1835 to put up the theatre for sale by auction to the highest bidder and when it was so put up on the 15th August, Prince Dwaraka Nath Tagore, grand father of the world-renowned poet Rabindranath Tagore purchased it with all its ward-robe and appurtenances. † The Prince did not take the theatre himself for any speculation, but for the purpose of promoting its interest in the name of the former proprietors, paying up double the price of shares and being a joint owner with them. But for such pecuniary sacrifice of a "native" the Theatre would have met with an untimely death.

* A. J Jan 1835

† 1835 Asiatic Journal

Necessarily the share-holders remained in great obligation to him.

In January 1837, an entertainment was given to Lord Auckland and His Excellency's two sisters, Misses Eden, for the interest they took and the patronage they extended to the Theatre. *Eden's letters give some idea of the theatrical condition of the time.*

Miss Eden, wrote to a friend‡:—"We are going to night to the play by "particular desire" not of ours but of the amateurs who have got up a play for us before our departure The thermometer is at 90, the new Theatre is without Punkha, the small evening breeze that sometimes blows ceases entirely in September and October and we are in black for our King."

In 1837 the privates of the 26th Regiment (Cameronian Regiment) got up performances of the Rob Roy, and Honest Thieves for the benefit of the orphans, but their offer of Rs. 600/- (as the sale proceeds) was declined by the Ladies' Committee. It was said that a high dignitary of the church instigated the refusal with a view to discourage theatrical performances.*

The condition again turned unsatisfactory and the Theatre again ran into debt, necessitating the house to be either sold or let out. An attempt was however made for the last. A meeting of Messrs. C. R. Princep, J. P. Grant., W. Young, W. P. Grant, and others with Mr. Mannuck—in the chair, decided that expenditure should

‡ 1837, Oct. 2, Miss Eden to Mrs. Lister—P. 291

* 1836 Miss Emily writes :—"Some of the boys in their gorgeous dresses looked very well, reciting and acting scenes from Shakespeare—It is one of prettiest sights I have seen in Calcutta

A J Jan 1835 Oct 183

be cut by half, but the house should not be even let ou
No man can, however, check the train of adversit
even the artists began to fall ill. From the contempo
neous returns given below, our readers will have an i
how misfortune fell not only upon the theatre, but u
the artists also.

"Our Keen—sick on the river
Proteus—gone to Sandheads
Count Almavive—gone to N. W. Province
Our Bob—on his back
The Monster—going to Cawnpore
Master Stepness—going to Simla
Master Madies—minding his hits
Mrs. Atkinson as ladies etc since dead
Mr. Chester ... ditto
Mrs. Leach ... too ill to act." †

The condition of theatre about this period may thus
described in the words of John Bull.. ...

"The Theatre ran into debt, elite of the amat
seceded from the Boards or kept aloof, scenery was l
better than a collection of dirty rags—the ward-robe
a mass of faded finery, the roof leaked, people got
habit of smoking cheroots in the house that bat and
and the supernatural superseded poetry and probab
aristrocracy rarely countenanced the performances

* June 19 1837, Bengal Hurkara—"The result of the Theatre is th
Theatre is not to be sold and that it is not to be let and propositi
Captain Hyde in one instance and of Mr. Farmer in another to lease
been neglected, we believe, without being put to the vote. We under
that in the opinion of the two gentlemen who investigated the accounts
Domin and Mr L P Grant the [illegible] (monthly) may witho[illegible]
culty be [illegible]ed by half.

† A. J 1838 May

in short, the drama had fallen as also where to in "the sere and yellow leaf."

Englishman, 2 June, 1839.

To crown all, in the early hours of *31st. May, 1839, the Chowringee Theatre was totally destroyed by fire.* The tragic fate of the theatre has been pathetically described by all the papers of the time and the Hurkara gives the following graphic description :—

"The Chowringee Theatre is no more or exists but as a crumbling and ghastly skeleton of its former self. Between one and two o'clock in the morning of the 31st ultimo it was discovered to be on fire and in about an hour it was blackened into an empty shell. All help was unavailing from the combustible nature of the various portions of the interior—scenery, furnitures etc. The flames made such a rapid progress that although engines arrived in the shortest possible time, they could do nothing for the preservation of the house. The whole inside of the theatre—boxes, pit and stage with all their decorations, appurtenances, in short, every thing that would burn had been burnt. The wooden dome made a most awful blaze which was seen from the most remote part of the town, until about half past two when it fell in with a tremendous crash The only portions of the premises which have escaped are the portion on the Westward, and a part of the house, to the south, occupied by the secretary. Not an atom of the furnitures and other appurtenances of the theatre has, as far as can be learnt, been saved from destruction. No one seems to know how the fire originated."

'Mr Chester s account is that after he has retired to

rest and when he had just fallen asleep he was going towards the door of communication between this house and the stage and encountered a volume of dense and suffocating smoke. There had been a rehearsal of the "Pilot" and "Sleeping Draught" which concluded at about half past twelve, shortly after which the party of the amateurs engaged in the representation broke up and retired from the theatre. On their departure, the lights were all carefully extinguished with the exception of one which was kept burning in the front of the stage every night.

Hurkaru June, 1st, 1839

"We are glad to see a spirit of kindliness abroad, which leads us to hope that some provision will be made for the sufferers by the late conflagration, of the Chowringhee Theatre."

"We do not of course, include in this number, the proprietors of the theatre who were all (we believe) amateurs in good circumstances and will not be seriously injured by the loss. We allude to Mrs. Francis, the oldest performer attachad to the theatre by which she was always scantily rewarded, to Mrs. Black, who is nearly of the same standing and has lately been left a widow, in indigent circumstances and more specially to Mr. and Mrs. Chester (the secretary and his wife) who have not only like Mrs. Francis and Mrs. Black lost the employment upon which they depended for support, but have also been deprived by the devouring element of their little all of personal property ; they have, we are assured on the best authority, scarcely a change of raiment or a plate or spoon or article of furniture of their own We are delighted to see that their deplorable case has attracted

consideration of the Lord Bishop the Archdeacon, the Managers of the late Theatre and few others."

Ibid June, 12.

So popular was the Chowringhee Theatre, that its destruction long continued as an important topic in most of the town circles.

The place was not insured and the loss to the proprietors was calculated to be Rs. 76,000/-.

The tragic end of the Theatre forcibly reminds us of the few lines of Lord Byron on the burning of the old Drury Lane Theatre on the 24th February 1809.....

"In one dread night our city saw and sighed
Bowed to the dust Drama's tower of pride
In one short hour beheld the blazing flame
Apollo sank and Shakespeare ceased to reign."

This brought to a close the most popular and the distinguished English Theatre of Calcutta, and there was no Sheridian here to revive it. No doubt a fair lady hastened to its rescue from its utter extinction but she was herself cruelly burnt in the flames.

Thus closed the Chowringhee Theatre, which inspite of the patronage the Bengalis could give was effaced from the face of the earth. We give below some account of its performances :—

Aug. 3rd. 1815—Sheridian's celebrated comedy, "The Rivals and Fortunes' Frolic" were performed. Sir Antony Absolute was received with enthusiasm and well merited applause. He acquitted himself with superior mood.

The performances at Chowringhee were got up with unusual ability Principal characters were sustained with peculiar

strength and force of expression. The audience bestowed repeated and well merited plaudits on the young actress who performed the parts of Miranda in the Busy Baby (Body) and Dol Lalolla in Tom Thumb. Tom Thumb, the hero, was performed by a young gentleman, an amateur, with singular felicity and in a style irresistibly ludicrous The success of the performance has very considerably diminished the debt which was incurred in repairing the damage sustained in the roof and additions to the theatre last year.

Jan 23rd, Bengal Hurkaru and 29th June Asiatic J 1,815.

Oct. 1; 1818—Last Friday, Merry Wives of Windsor gratified expectations. The quarrel was sustained with infinite drollery. Governor General was present The house was crowded to excess and reminded us of the lines in the rejected address :—

"Now the full benches, to late comers, doom
No room for standing, miscalled standing room."

1st. July 1817.—Marquis of Hastings was present, and an address was given.

"The Road to Ruin" was on a Friday* given a representation but not a crowded house and we marvel if our Chowringhee boards boasted of a better Gold-finch than the gentleman in the end proved himself to be. The part of Goldfinch introduced an amateur of a sister province His stature is rather above the middle size and his person manly and agreeable. He appeared awkward in the first scene and his manner in walking round to exhibit his person was ludicrous rather than such as a to give full effect his "that's your sort." His subsequent scene, however, made up as we have before hinted, for the defects of the first and the scene with Millford in the last Act when he describes the Arts of Jokey in both words and action was given with a caricature certainly unparalleled on these boards perhaps on any other in the present day and to be equalled only in the annals of the

* March 1828. A Journal vol xxx.

real sporting. The effect was irresistible and was followed by the loudest applause, and we heard it whispered that this was the first attempt in the part of Goldfinch and this circumstance would speak greatly in favour of the versatility of theatrical talent possessed by the amateur, if we contrast the characters of Octavian and Shylock in which, we hear, he stands unrivalled in India. On the whole, the play was excellently performed and though the tradesmen were a shockingly motley group and the scenery not quite sufficiently attended to, we cannot but be well pleased with the evening's amusement.

John Bull. Sept. 3rd

Oct. 1825. A. J.—On Friday the theatre was crowded to the bumper. The amusements were the comedy of "Catherina Petruchio" a most masterly performanee in every respect and an admirable drama. The whole performance passed off in a very spirited manner and amidst loud applause.

"Love laughs at Locksmith" was one of the completest things seen on the boards for an age. Totteran was inimitably great in the par. This amateur is truly a most valuable acquisition to our boards, and possesses a greater degreee of versatility than we had imagined. The part was charmingly and brilliantly performed.

Calcutta Gazette, Oct. 30. 1826 (Ref. A. J. April 27.)...

On Friday Oct. 27—"The Sleeping Draught" and Miller and his Men were performed before one of the most brilliant and crowded audiences ever witnessed in the Theatre. The pieces were got up in a hurry which accounts for some failures in the scenery and machinery. The performers were mostly new to these boards and allowance, therefore, must be made for any little defects. The representation of Papolino evidently possesses considerable dramatic talent...Dr Vincolo is also a new performer of great merit and he would be a great acquisition to the Chowringhee boards in this line of character He has abundant energy and no want of humour and his person and

"The Iron Chest and Monsieur Tenson" both were most successful thespian efforts, there having not a single instance of failure and all appearing perfect in their parts. Monsieur Tenson called forth continued plaudits and bursts of laughter from the audience. We cannot imagine possibly a better effort of dramatic comic talent than Morbleu.

Tom King was without exception. We think the best dramatic essay yet exhibited on our boards by the amateurs who represented the part. In dress, movements, gesture, language, looks every thing, he was quite above all praise. It was a gay, elegant and spirited performance, full of that *vivida vis animi*, we should virtually look for in a "fine young fellow about town" The other characters were capitally supported and the ladies of the piece acquitted themselves in this as well as the preceding one to the highest advantage.

Bengal Chronicle Nov. 6, 1827 (A. J. April 1828)...

Otway's tragedy, "Venice Preserved", represented on Friday Nov. 2nd. was one of the most successful representations, we have witnessed on these boards for a long time The house though not crowded was very respectfully filled and the curtain fell at the early hour of half past 9 amidst the unanimous applause of the audience.

A. J. Sept. 1827, Indian Gazette, Feb. 2.

Chowringhee Theatre was very full, to much satisfaction—the Water man and Monsieur Tenson in able manner were performed. Morblew in the latter surpassed his former per excellence—that he was most capitally dressed and accounted altogether, carried himself admirable throughout and entirely identified himself with the whimsical character of the distracted, but most exquisitely amusing old Frenchman.

The performances at Chowringee Theatre last night amply realised all the anticipations which had been formed of them. The scenes from Don Giovani were rich treat to the lovers of music ; the beautiful tenor of Mr. Linton and the rich deep ass of the representative of the statue were as fine as anything we ever heard on these boards. We need ly add that

full justice was done by the Orchestra to this beautiful composition of Mozart's. A more exquisite buffo than the representative of Leporallo we have never witnessed. The scenery was beautiful and the diablerie got up and most skilfully managed. *

Mrs. Leach as Lady Teazle on July 27.

Chowringee Theatre—On Thursday night. Pizzaro was repeated at our Drury. Lord Combermere was received with most marked reiterated praise, next His Excellency Sir Archbald Campbell and last of all Rt. Hon'ble the Governor General and Lady Amherst. The address given to them was admirably spoken by the father of our Drury.

India Gazette Nov. 5.—All together with a few exceptions "Venice Preserved" was one of the most deliberate murders we have ever seen on the Chowringee boards.

The theatre re-opened on the first Friday of February 1826 when the condition improved a little. About 7 p.m, on the reopening night, the house was full to the overflowing and several persons for want of seats had to stand. The Rt. Hon'ble The Governor General and Lady Amherst honoured the house with their presence. On their entrance, the orchestra struck up "God save the King" though not played well.

India Gazette Feb. 6th, 1826.

The services of Mrs. Leach were secured and some of the best plays were staged with great success with the assistance of brilliant casts of artists and it was then that the theatre reached the height of its reputation and prosperity (up to 1832). In the meantime alteration and improvement to the extent of Rs. 9,000/- was made in the summer of 1828, the amount being raised by contribution from the proprietors in the proportion of Rs. 100/- for each share and Rs. 50/- on each share more than one. —*A. J. Aug. 1828.*

A youngman playing Clerimont made a most triumphant. He poss essed high q ua ifi at ons for the sock and buskin, a good

voice...............Lord William Bentinck did not extend his predecessors' patronage.

The piece cast was "Honey Moon." The next week "Old Maid" and "High Life Below Stairs" were played amidst loud applause of a very crowded rather warm house.

During the regime of Lord Amherst the Chowringee Theatre was at the zenith of its popularity and fame, and performance held every week on Thursday.

After this the affairs took again an unsatisfactory turn and in 1835 it was leased out to an Italian Company which, however, failed in the payment of the high rent of Rs. 1,000/- a month; and the French Company which next took lease of the theatre also could not pay Rs. 50/- per night, which they agreed upon to pay. The theatre was in debt and the prices for admission, were reduced, namely to Rs. 6/- for the pit.

(Asiatic Journal January 1835)

John Bull January 25.

On the 23rd January a new farce was brought out at this Theatre entitled "1, 2, 3, 4, 5" by the advertisement.

The plot was humorous and well commenced and consisted of three characters, viz two lovers and an old man, the father of the lady......and who advertises in newspaper for a husband for his daughter. It is agreed between the young people that the lover shall apply in consequence of the advertisement and by personating the ludicrous, so surfeit the old father, and he shall be glad to bestow his daughter on the object of her choice. The lover of course succeeds, and they all invited in the end. The lady says "If we fail we shall not fail my loveland away" The youth proceeds to the accomplishment of his wishes

The gentleman who played the lover was quite successful in the several characters assigned to him resembling Silvester Daggerword [1] in these parts he gave imitations of some of the stars of the Cho Boards with great success The old man was played by a prime favourite the dance was in many

respects superior and song enchored, the house was well attended and the boxes occupied by many respectable persons of the settlement.

A new comedy entitled "Peter Fin or a Trip to Brighton," the author of which is Mr T. Jones, was represented at B I. on Friday last The characters were all sustained respectably

Bengal Hurkara April 4th, 1826.

Bengal Hurkara. Oct 22.—The "Castle Spectre" was performed on Friday evening at Chowringhee Theatre to an audience which has never been recorded in numbers of fashion; in fact the house was crowded to the very standing places. As had been announced in the papers of the Presidency, the Rt Hon'ble Earl Amherst, the Countess and Lady Sarah Amherst honoured the house with their presence as did also the members of the council and many other distinguished individuals. About 7 o'clock the Rt. Hon'ble the Governor General with his Lordship's family and suite made their entry and were greeted on their first appearance at the Theatre since their return to the Presidency, with three distinct rounds of applause, the audience standing and the Orchestra playing "God save the King"

CHAPTER V

THE SANS-SOUCI THEATRE

Within a month after the destruction of the Chowringee Theatre, Mrs. Leach arrived in Calcutta and was greatly shocked at the lamentable news of the tragic fate of the Chowringee Theatre. She, however, did not allow her sorrow to rot in idle sentiments but sat herself earnestly to work and opened a temporary theatre under the title of Sans-Souci at the corner of the Government Place East, Waterloo Street—the place, where according to Rev. Mr. Long, Sir John Clavering * had lived before. The site is now occupied by Ezra Mansions, but at that time, in the upper flat of the Building was St. Andrew's Library and the lower flat that looked more like a godown was converted by Mrs. Leach into an elegant theatre sufficient to accommodate 400 persons with the help of "carver's and gilder's art."

On the opening night—August 21st 1839, Sheridan Knowless's "Hunch Back" was staged with Mrs. Leach as Julia. All the sale proceeds of the night were devoted to allay the distress of her old stage-associates Mrs. Francis and Mrs. Black who had lost everything during the last fire. Mrs. Leach as lessee continued the performances here for about a year till the 'larger house was

* But according to Dr Busteed Sir John lived at 8 Rope Walk. See page 177 Supra.

being reared on her account' at the Park Street (No. 10.) at the site of the present St. Xavier's College. The subscriptions came in liberal response, the last being headed by Lord Auckland and Prince Dwarakanath Tagore* who contributed Rupees one thousand each and the total amount of the subscription rose to Rs. 16000. This also included some money contributed by Mrs. Leach herself. Mr. Stocqueler. Editor, Englishman also offered his services to help her in her noble enterprise. The whole fitting and construction including scenery and wardrobe cost Rs. 80,000/- the rest being raised by the mortgage of the property and all it was to contain. Mr. J. W. Collins was the architect of the theatre and the structure measuring 200 feet in length and 50 feet breadth was built with a handsome portico in front. The stage occupied 28 feet in breadth, 50 feet depth, the space concealed from the audience above and below being appropriated to the green rooms etc. The building was completed *in May 1840* but the formal opening took place on *March 8, 1841* with Sheridan Knowless's "The Wife" under the patronage and immediate presence of the Governor General Lord Auckland and suite when Mrs. Leach who took the part of Marians recited a metrical prologue written for the occasion by Mr. J. W. Kaye (afterwards Sir John) the historian of the Sepoy War, and editor, Bengal Hurkara. Two days before this i e. on *the 6th March*, about 90 gentlemen sat down to a splendid dinner on the stage of the new theatre with Mr. Turton on the chair. The stage

* **Mrs. Leach the actress has issued proposals for building a new theatre by subscription the list is headed by donation of Rs. 1000 from Lord Auckland and of the same amount from Dwaraka Nath Tagore**

(A J Ju e 1840)

pillars were decorated with wreaths of flowers After the song the "Queen" Mr. Turton proposed the health of Sir John Peter Grant and the judges of the Supreme Court. Sir John remarked that he attended the theatre as much from a sense of public duty as from motives of private entertainment and he looked upon drama in a well organised stage as a great instrument of civilisation and refinement and hoped that this new theatre would prove much benefit to the society at large.

(*Asiatic Journal 1841, May.*)

As some of the actors had left theatre altogether, for the catastrophe, Mr. Slocqueler had to seek recruits and amongst others got Mr. Henry Torrens, Mr. Hume a Barrister, afterwards Chief Presidency Magistrate Calcutta as amateurs, and also some professionals through his London agent—one Mrs Deacle, a Miss Cowley and a Mr. Berry, a pantomimist from Cambridge, with his wife. We had on the authority of Mr. Stocqueler "that Torren's Sir Peter Teazle was *suijuris*. Hume had an idea that he was a tragedian ; his declamatory powers were fine and he had a tendency to bear a passion to tatters which found room for gratification in Othello and Macbeth, but his figure was thick and lumpy and his face devoid of suitable expression. Mrs. Deacle who as Miss Darling made a gorgeous Cleopetra, and had not her devotion to Bacchus been interfered with, by her attention to the rites of Thalia and Melpomime, she might have been valuable. Mr Berry had a capricious voice which used to desert him at the critical moment but he was able to atone for his lingual deficiency by intelligible dumb show." Mrs. Eden wrote in her reminiscenes of theatre in her letters from India, "A little Miss Cowly is one of the best comic actresses

I have seen, and had a great success .....She is very ugly."*

The performances at the New Theatre were continued for sometime with regularity · punkhas of course being pulled in summer, but affairs both at home and abroad cast a gloom over it. The war with Afganisthan had a great effect on it, and the Amir Dost Mohomed unwilling to make treaty unless Peshwar then in occupation of the Sikh Chief, Ranjit Singh, were given to him, and wanting to have friendly relations with Russia was drawn into a war with the Indian Government Lord Auckland sent a British regiment ; Sha Shuja, Ahmed Shah Durani's grandson friendly with the British was restored to the throne and Dost Mohomed who surrendered in Nov. 1840 was sent down to Calcutta on a liberal allowance.

On the 11th Oct. 1841, Dost Mohomed was present at the Sans-Souci Theatre where the melo-drama of Tekli was performed before a larger audience than had ever crowded into the the New Theatre—the combined attractions of a melo dramatic spectacle and an Ex-King filled the house to over-flowing. The Hurkara says, Dost Mohomed and his party were greatly delighted with it, and runs thus :—

"The fat sides of Hyderkhan were shaken intensely with much laughter. When the Dost first made his appearance, he was greeted with a round of applause, but as he did not seem to appreciate or understand the compliment, the plaudits very soon subsided."

4 I Oct 1841

* After th[illegible] Miss Co[illegible]ey be[illegible]ame Mrs. Marsha[illegible]l in 1840

Dost's son Akbar Khan shortly after raised the standard of rebellion against the British and treacherously killed Sir William Macnaghton.

The British Army then retired towards India and was annihilated in the Khyberpass This seriously affected the theatrical entertainments as we notice in the words of Mr. Stocqueler, "With the tales of bloodshed ringing in their ears people were in no mood to go to places of entertainment. Many had lost their relations, not a few mourned friends and acquaintances and everybody felt abashed at the sad reverses our arms had sustained. It was necessary to create a fund for the relief of the widows. It is in such times theatres suffer; luxuries can better be spared than the necessaries of life. Lord Auckland who had been a great patron ot the Theatre returned a sorrowful man."

Lord Ellenborough, unlike his predecessor, disliked theatres, and Mrs. Leach also could not afterwards pay anymore money. The management necessarily passed into the hands of others, who however retained her services on a handsome salary. Next on November 2, 1843, happened a very tragic incident, unheared of in the history of the Calcutta theatres. The catastrophe which cost Mrs. Leach her life also brought to a close the last English theatre in which the Bengalees took a keen interest. After that, English Companies have no doubt given performances now and then, but the Bengalees had little concern for any of them.

Mrs. Leach, the queen of the Indian stage, as she was called, appeared as Mrs Wyindham in the farce "The Handsome Husband" an after piece of Merchant of

Venice for the night where Mr. James Vining an actor of London-fame, appeared for the first time as Shylock in Calcutta. The house was full, all was in glee and merriment, and cheers resounded. In the midst of all these, while Mrs. Leach was waiting for her cue, at the upper right hand entrance of the stage, her dress caught fire from an oil-lamp, one of a row placed on the floor and in an instant she was in flames. For a time she struggled with the fire to put it out, but unable to free herself from it rushed into the stage calling for help. The fire was no doubt put out, but she was severely burnt on her arms and shoulders. The curtain fell immediately and she was carried to her dressing room and thence to the residence adjoining the theatre where the Lord Bishop's house now stands. Assistance was promptly offered including the professional services of O' Shanguessy and Thompson who happened to be among the audience. She could not survive the fatal burning. During her suffering she appeared to rally once or twice but her own impression was that the injuries would prove fatal. Perfectly conscious, she passed away on Nov. 22, 1843 at the age of 34, leaving three orphan children behind, all without any provision. She was buried in the Military Cemetery at Bhowanipore and Madam Baxter the proprietor gave up the sale proceeds of the 22nd November performance in aid of the children though the result was not very gratifying.

Such was the tragic end of a brilliant career—a career of bright and uniform success. Alas! Man is but a puppet in the hands of Destiny like the clay in a potter's

hand. Her name though now sunk in oblivion will always be gratefully recorded in the history of the Bengali stage, for, as we have seen, the Chowringhee Theatre exercised immense influence upon the educated Bengalees of that time. Mrs. Leach was beautiful, clever and a gifted artist for which she was rightly called the "Queen of the Indian Stage," but she excelled more in emotional parts in the display of tender passions and pathos than in the violent tragedies. Lofty tragedy was in a sense beyond her reach, yet she deserves her just meet, for she was quite unique in her own element.

Shortly after Mrs. Leach's death, Mr. and Mrs. Ormand who were on their way to India arrived by the *Bentinck* and joined the Theatre. Othello was staged on April 24, 1844. But with the death of Mrs. Leach who was in truth the life of the Theatre, it fell on evil days. It was then leased out to a French Company. But it was down on its luck and the days of the Sans-Souci seemed to be numbered. Its last performance was Othello in aid of Madame Baxter.

The building was then sold in 1846 for 4000/- to the Rt. Hon'ble Dr. Carew (the then Arch Bishop). It was at first called St. John's College, and on the arrival of the Belgian Jesuits in 1859, it was placed under the official management of the St Xavier's College which opened here on 9th January in 1860 under the direction and control of Jesuit Fathers. There have been considerable additions and alterations in the buildings but the handsome portico and fine flight of steps are still in existence.

Thus ended Mrs. Leach's Sans-Souci, but the last tie was not cut till the departure of our old friend Mr

Berry on the 21st May 1849. He used to give occasional performances under the old name Sans-Souci at his private residence at 14, Wellington Square, and Bengali artists were taken there Sanghād Pravākar mentions about one Bengali actor—Baishnava Charan Addy who twice played the part of Othello here with great credit on Aug. 17 and Sept. 12, 1848.*

Vaskar † gave the last account of the Sans-Souci and we reproduce it here :—"Mr. Berry presents his respectful compliments to the public of Calcutta and by the request of several friends who are anxious to support him on the present occasion, begs to announce that on Monday evening the 21st instant will be acted at the solicitation of several officers, Mrs Charles George's Militaiy drama of the "Maid of Croissey"—after which scenes from Merchant of Venice—Shylock by a gentleman—to conclude with the farce of "Lovers' Quarrels" and an address written on the occasion."

"Mr Berry in returning to the public his most grateful acknowledgment for the liberal and kind support shown him for the last 6 years of his management of the above theatre, announces positively his farewell on the 21st instant as in the following morning he shall embark on board the Minerva for England. Mr. Berry purposes on his arrival in England at his own risk such professional talent as will enable him—to see the drama once again maintain a position worthy of its patrons.

14, Wellington Square May 14, 1849.‡

* Sambad Pravakar Aug 21 and Sept, 21, 1848

† 19th May 1849 Vaskar

After this we had no hear of Sans-Souci again

After the closing of the Sans-Souci, the next theatres which came into public notice were Von Golder's Lyric Theatre in 1857, the Lyceum on the Maidan, Lewis Theatre, Royal and Opera House.

Mr. C J. Mathews appeared at the Opera House (or English Theatre) before H. R. H. the Prince of Wales in 1891, the prices of seats were:—upper tier boxes Rs. 1000/- lower tier Rs. 500/- and stalls Rs. 30 each.

The Lewis theatre greatly influenced the Bengali artists to start the National, the Bengal theatre and the Great National. Further details or description of English theatres tn Bengal are quite unnecessary for our purpose.

While attempts in theatrical performances were generally crowned with success in Calcutta, Bombay rather proved conservative. On the authority of a report in the Asiatic Journal we learn that the project of getting up a new theatre, as was expected, excited strong opposition amongst a certain class at the presidency who denounced theatrical amusements as profane and immoral.

Oct. 1840 A. J. Bombay.

INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH THEATRES ON THE BENGALEES.

We have done with the early English theatres of Calcutta and we have no hesitation to admit that they were not only the fore-runners of the Bengali Stage but also inspired the enlightened Hindus with a love for theatre and with a strong desire for the establishment of the genuine Bengali Theatre. The English Stage in Calcutta used to be patronised by our countrymen and both the

Chowringee theatre and the Sans-Souci owed much to the princely liberality of Dwarakanath Tagore,* and his contributions to the growth of stage were not less than that of a Torrens or Parker. Such was the earnestness for English plays amongst our countrymen that each night a number of Bengali spectators were amongst the audiences, as is testified to by the following observations of the Asiatic Journal —

The India Gazette adds "It affords us pleasure to observe such a number of respectable natives among the audience every play-night, it indicates a growing taste for the English Drama which is an auspicious sign of the progress of general literature amongst our native friends."

In fact, though we had a great past and Bengali drama owes considerably to old Sanskrit play, still there is no gainsaying the fact that the modern Bengali Theatre is more an imitation of the English Stage, and to write about the Bengali Stage without noticing this evolution and the influences of the English theatres is simply to ignore the source. We have therefore taken great pains to unearth the History which has hitherto remained unexplored.

---

* Vide pages, 256 269—See also Hindu Patriot Aug. 5. 1858 which speaking of performance of Ratnabali at Belgachhia refers to him—"To many of our elder visitors both European and Native who remember the days of the late Babu Dwarakanath Tagore Meridith Parker Horace Wilson Henry Torrens and the Ch gee and Sans-Souci Theatres this revi al will

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST BENGALI THEATRE

We have done with our account of the early English Theatres of Calcutta and now come to the most interesting stage in the evolution of the modern Bengali Theatre. It indeed took a long time for Bengal to possess a genuine stage of her own, and the history of the first Bengali endeavours in this line will appear amazing to a modern reader from the enthusiasm it then created for dramatic performance among the elites of the country. Most elaborate and expensive preparations were made for the temporary performance of Hindu plays as by the Hindu Theatre in 1831 and by the Shyambazar Theatre at Nabin Babu's House in 1833. But before we enter into any details it is necessary to remove one wrong impression in this connection. Sj. Jogendra Nath Bose in his famous biography of Michæl Madhusudan Dutt, has said that the Sans-Souci Theatre greatly influenced the above mentioned two theatres. With due respect to Jogendra Babu's authority on many other points, it should be pointed out here that both the Hindu Theatre and the Shambazar Theatre were closed long before the Sans-Souci came into existence at all. It was in fact the Chowringhee Theatre and two liberal minded educationists, Capt Richardson and Dr. Wilson, who exercised an enormous influence upon the educated pioneers of the Bengali

Theatre. But for Dr. Wilson, the Hindu Theatre would not have come into existence at all. Capt. Richardson too always encouraged his pupils to attend the theatre. The first Bengali efforts after dramatic performance in Bengali were indeed greatly due to Richardson's influence upon his favourite pupils, some of whom were pioneers in this field.

From a reference in the Asiatic Journal of 1829, we find that many respectable Bengali gentlemen went to witness English plays and their number was ever on the increase Jatras in fact failed to satisfy the educated people and the absence of a Bengali stage was keenly felt At last some of the contemporary papers began to advocate the cause of a Bengali theatre and of dramatic performances in Bengali. The Asiatic Journal of that time publishes the exhortations of Samachar Chandrika urging for dramatic performances by the Bengalis in Bengali—

"In the extensive city public institutions of various kinds and moral descriptions have lately sprung up for the improvement and gratification of its inhabitants ; but their amusement has not yet been consulted and they have not, like the English community any place of public entertainment. In former times, actors and actresses were attached to the courts of the princes of India, who represented plays and charmed the audience with graceful poetry and music and impassioned action. We have had of late some Sakher Jatras exhibited which though not perfect gave great diversion to the people they have been however infrequent It is therefore desirable that men

theatre on the principle of shares, as the English gentlemen have done* and retaining qualified persons on fixed salaries, exhibit a new performance of song and poetry once a month conformably to the written Nataks or plays, and under the authority of a manager; such a plan will promote the pleasure of all classes of Society."

Asiatic Journal Aug. 1829.

All these gave an impetus to the cultured minds; and men of wealth and rank were not found wanting. The Hindu theatre of Prasanna Kumar Tagore and the Shambazar Theatre of Nabin Krishna Bose are the products of the direct influence of English theatres at Chowringhee.

I. THE HINDU THEATRE:

The Hindu Theatre owed its existence primarily to the efforts of Prasanna Kumar Tagore, a premier noble man of Calcutta to whose charity for the cause of education, the Calcutta University owes a good deal. He took a lively interest in all things that might contribute to the progress of his country, felt interested in dramatic shows and to his noble zeal we owe the famous Hindu Theatre which was undoubtedly the first Bengali attempt. Pandit Mohendra Nath Vidyanidhi put Nabin Babu's theatre first in time, but we shall be able to show that the Pandit's surmise was not accurate and that this was the earliest attempt.

The May issue of Asiatic Journal 1832, puts 28th Dec. 1831 being the date when this theatre was opened.

Three months before this on a Sunday a meeting

* Compare the Calcutta and Chowringhee

was called by Prasanna Kumar Tagore to take into consideration a proposal for establishing a new theatre and the following resolutions were passed—1. That theatres are useful 2. "Hindu Theatre" be established 3. A managing committee be formed with the following gentlemen—

Babu Prasanna Kumar Thakoor, Srikissen Singh, Kishen Chunder Dutt, Ganga Charan Sen, Madhob Chandra Mullick, Tara Chand Chakravarty and Hara Chandra Ghosh."

The above Journal further says :—

The Hindu Theatre (amateur) opened on 1831, 28th Dec. Wednesday : The entertainments were a portion of the Utter Ram Charita (translated by Professor Wilson) and a part of Julius Cæsar

Sir Edward Ryan † and other European gentlemen as well as some ladies were present.

The Calcutta Monthly journal and Hindu Reformer of January 1832 further state that Dr. Wilson (H. H) not only translated the piece by Bhababhuti but also drilled the actors under his direct supervision. The performances were enacted in the garden house of Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore at Shundo (Belliaghata) followed by the fifth Act of Julius Cæsar before a house crowded to overflowing by a highly respectable audience consisting of notable persons like the Judges of Supreme court, Rajah Radhakanta Deb and several orther distinguished persons were present. Babu Gourdas Bysak also wrote :—

* The Samachar Darpan (of September 17th, 1831) also published a similar notice.

† The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

"It is perhaps scarcely known that the earliest attempt towards the revival ot Hindu Drama was made by the late Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore. The drama Uttara Ram Charita, translated by Dr. Horace Hayman Wilson, from the original sanskrit of Bhababhuti was acted on the stage set up by the former under the direction and personal superintendence of the Doctor."

A correspondent of Samachar Darpan, 7th Jan. 1832, who himself did not see the performance but heard from a friend, hoped that, as the parts of Ram Lila were played by the Hindu youths of rich family who got dressed at their own cost, it would be attractive.

The amateurs were Ganga Charan Sen, Prof. Ram Chandra Mitra and others of the Hindu and Sanskrit Colleges but inspite of the brilliant success the theatre had a very short lease of life and was closed before long *

They next tried their hands with "Nothing Superfluous" staged on the 29th March 1832 and the parts of Geafar, Sultan and the fair Gulnair were successfully represented, as we gather from a letter from an English correspondent who styled himself as a friend of the natives, published in the India Gazette of Saturday March 31, 1832 :—

"The play commenced at half after 7, in presence of a highly respectable European and Native audience. The principal characters were the Sultan Salim, Geafar, Sadi and the Fair Gulnair; the courtly figure and the

* Hindu Pioneer Oct 22, 1835. "Like the Hindu Theatre *not suffer it to meet with a death-blow in its very origin*

The Calcutta Courier 28 Jan 1840—The Theatre was given up one or two years after its establishmen

proud independent air of Salim were well suited to the character of an eastern monarch. Geafar also sustained his part with credit to himself and the feminine blandishment, assumed by the fair Gulnair, displayed much fine taste and a right conception of the character of an eastern beauty; but the judgment and theatrical tact displayed by Sadi throughout the varied and difficult parts he had to perform, were calculated to surpass the most sanguine expectations. .. ..

"The dresses of the actors were superbly rich and the scenery although inferior to that of the principal theatres was yet arranged with much taste The minor characters were also very creditably sustained by the amateurs. In fact, the whole went off with great eclat, reflecting the highest credit on every one connected wtth the Hindu Theatre.†"

Fulminations of the Anglo-Indian Press.

Then followed a very interesting episode The Anglo Indian Papers treated the Bengali enterprise in this direction with great contempt. The "*East Indian*" made the following uncharitable remarks:—

" .. We hear that the performances are to be in the English language. Who advised this strange proceeding we know not, but it is surely worth re-consideration—what can be worse than to have the best dramatic compositions

† The Calcutta Courier of 4th April 1832 has also the following :—we can not quit the subject of theatricals without noticing a very entertaining performance at the Hindu Theatre last Thursday evening. Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore has fitted up a neat little stage in his house in Narkeldangah where some young Hindoo gentlemen admirably schooled in the Histrionic art exercise their talents for the amusement of their native and European friends who are admitted by invitation. The piece got up for the evening was a little farce entitled Nothing Superfluous.

in English language murdered outright, night after night, foreign manners misrepresented and instead of holding the mirror upto nature caricaturing everything human? We recommend our Hindu patriots and philanthropists to instruct their countrymen by means of schools and when they are fitted to appreciate the dramatic compositions of refined nations, it will be quite time enough to erect theatre ..... A theatre among the Hindus with the degree of knowledge they at present possess will be like building a palace in the waste."

Asiatic Journal 1832 Jan.—April.

A similar opinion was expressed by an English writer of the Asiatic Journal* who criticised about the Bengalees staging English plays :—

"While upon the subject of theatricals in and near the Presidency an exhibition, more strange than amusing, should not pass unnoticed; the performance or rather the attempted performance of English plays by Hindu youths; an undertaking which as may readily be supposed was not crowned with much success. The inauspicious beginning however may lead to better things; native aspirants for the honours of the sock and buskin may perceive the propriety of confining themselves to the representation of dramas to which their complexion would be appropriate; and when the catalogue of European plays is exhausted, the Aurongzebs and Tamerlines have run themselves out of favour, authors may start up amidst the corps and employ their pens in illustrating the public and domestic occurrences of their country in tragedy, comedy, opera and farce. Though

*A. J 1834 Jan. April, vol. xiii Barrackpore and Dumdum page 25

the execution might not be first rate, such productions could not fail to be extremely curious and interesting; they would lead to a better acquaintance with the manners and customs of the people of Hindustan and prevent such monstrous exhibitions as are presented to this enlightened age in dramas resembling those styled "The Cataracts of the Ganges," "The Lions of Mysore" etc

The "Enquirer" however differed from the above narrow view and expressed—"there are now to be found in the Hindu community persons who do not fall short of our European stagers in dramatic informations. These, in consequence, may by practice do adequate justice to a tragedy or to a comedy . "

But the most effective reply to these mean fulminations inspired by racial pride was given by the intelligentia of Bengal. The dramatist, the actor and the audience all proved that all such observations were quite uncalled for and baseless. It was thus admitted within a short time, by Englishmen who "expressed the high satisfaction derived from the entertainment of a particular evening which more than confirmed the favourable account published in various papers of the day"

India Gazette March 31, 1832.

II. "VIDYASUNDAR"

IN

NABIN'S THEATRE IN SHAMBAZAR

Next comes in point of time the Vidyasundar Play which was staged at the Shambazar Theatre situated in the house of Babu Nabin Krishna Bose at Shambazar Though started a few months after the Hindu Theatre,

it stands today established as the First Bengali Theatre, since we have no clear evidence of other shows being represented in respect of site, time and other details, and since the performances of the Hindu Theatre were in English. Lebedeff started the "Bengali Theatre" with the Bengali translation of an English Play, for the entertainment of his European friends, but Nabin Babu spared no pains, and spent money rather in a lavish manner for the entertainment of his Bengali brethren by staging a genuine Bengali play. His big house on the ruins of which the Shambazar Tram depot now stands, laid with spacious garden, orchards, tanks and gravel paths, offered the most magnificent site for the performance of "Vidyasundar"—a bold erotic romance of sensuous school by Bharot Chandra Roy Gunakar who lived at the time of the Battle of Plassy. To display thunder and lightening to the audience, Nabin Babu had apparatuses and mechanical contrivances procured at a heavy cost from England. Yet Nabin Babu had no stage in his house like the one of the present day and the audience had therefore to move several times to different places to witness different scenes. The scene of Sundara seated on the banks of a tank under a Bakul tree was shown in the tank within the garden of Nabin Babu. The stately council chamber of Beersingh the Raja of Burdwan was shown in his drawing room and the thatched cottage of Malini (female-gardener) in another part of the house. Earth was dug to show the underground tunnel leading from Malini's house to the interior of the Rajah's palace. In a similar but in a more crude form Ramlila * is sometimes

* Vide page, 87 supra.

acted in upper India, but it reminds us more about the medieval stage of Europe. The stage in Shakespeare's time was "a raised bare platform, jutting out some considerable distance among the audience, so that the groups of players were seen from any point of view. The central part of the theatre into which the stage protruded was unrooted and plays were given by the light of the day. There was no painted scenery. At the back of the stage a wooden erection, hollow, and hung with some kind of tapestry served many purposes. It was Juliets tomb, canopy of Desdemona's bed . .. . The top of the structure was used as occasion demanded for the battlements of Flint Castle in Richard II, or for balcony in Romeo and Juliet, and so on."

The performances in Nabin's home continued from midnight to morning (12½ to 6½). The portion was first read by a person by way of prologue from Bharat Chandra and the portion incorporated in acting used to be recited as a dialogue.

The part of Sundar was taken by Shama Charan Banerjee of Barahnagar, a remarkably handsome young-man, who had not much of education but was expert in singing well and Sitar-playing.

The well-known rustic song, the origin of which we could not ascertain, runs thus :—

> Nabin Babu was Kalua
> Raja Vaidyanath was Bhulna
> Shamacharan Bandopadhya of Barahnagar was
> Sundar

showing how Shyama Charan was one of the three distinguished men of his time

Another important feature of this theatre was the introduction of actresses for the exhibition of female characters. The part of the heroine (Vidya) was taken by Radhamoni* (or Mani—a Hindustani Bai born in Bengal of Bengali father) a public woman and two other women of her class Raj Kumari and Joydurga appeared in other roles, the former as Sahachari, and the latter as Rani and Mohini. Rajkumari and Bow Haro Mathrani were amongst the attendants.

Nabin was for long known as the pioneer in introducing actresses for the representation of female characters in Bengali Theatre but we have shown from authentic records that the first appearances of actresses occurred as early as in 1795. That was however forgotten and Nabin Babu appears to have made all possible improvements and in his zeal for effecting dramatic improvements he spared neither pains nor money. Surely he got the idea of introducing women on the stage from the Chowringee Theatre It was about this time that Mrs. Leach and her stage-associates were displaying their dramatic talents and shortly before this a band of performers from Manipur was then exhibiting in Calcutta, representing the sports of Krishna with the Gopees—the musicians were men but singers were women. †

The same journal also quotes another important fact from "Samachar Chandrika" that a company of performers under Haladhar was also acting with great success in the houses of Indian gentlemen; they represented the

* Mr. D. N. Bose had the occasion of seeing Mom in her old age how in her poor condition and having lost health and beauty she had to beg from door to door after

† Vide Asiatic Journal 82 April.

Jatras of Vidyasundar the destuction of Sambhu and Nishambhoo of mythological fame,—Nabin evidently got the idea of staging Vidya Sundar at his house, getting the inspiration from the performances in English theatres as well as Jatra performers with female actresses at the time. It will be quite in fitness that we should reproduce here the full text of a contemporaneous article in Hindu Pioneer of October 1835, quoted in Asiatic Journal of 1836 (April issue), under the caption "Native Theatre"

For the first time about 32 years ago, late Pandit Mohendra Nath Vidyanidhi published the Hindu Pioneer-article, a copy of which he got from Mr. Atal Ch. Sen, late Honorary Magistrate, Sealdah. The Pandit mentioned however that this theatre was started before Hindu Theatre i.e. in 1831, which is evidently a mistake—the article itself shows that Nabin Babu's theatre was started about 1833, and that the Hindu Theatre was then long closed. Besides, the Pandit concluded from a surmise which was not correct. Probably he wanted to show that the Bengali attempt preceded the English performance. But this small inaccuracy apart, the Pandit's contributions as the *pioneer* and the original research scholar in this field of Bengali Stage must always be remembered with gratitude and regards by all of us who have followed him.

"THE NATIVE THEATRE"*

"This private Theatre got up about two years ago is still supported by Babu Nabin Chandra Bose. It is situated in the residence of the proprietor at Shambazar where four or five plays were acted during the year.

* Fortnightly Journal Hindu Pioneer Oct 1835

These are native performances by the people entirely Hindus, after the English fashion, in the vernacular language of their country : and what elates us with joy, as it should do all the friends of Indian improvement, is that the fair sex of Bengal are always seen on the stage as the female parts are almost exclusively performed by Hindu women. We had the pleasure of attending at a play one evening during the last full moon ; and we must acknowledge that we were highly delighted. That house was crowded by upwards of a thousand visitors, of all sorts—Hindu, Mohumadans, and some Europeans and East Indians, who were equally delighted. The play commenced a little before 12 o'clock and continued the next day, till half past six in the morning. We were present from the beginning and witnessed almost the whole representation with the exception of the last two scenes. The subject of the performance was "Bidya-sundar". It is tragi-comic and one of the masterpieces in Bengali by the celebrated Bharat chander. I need scarcely explain the details of the play which is commonly known by every person who can read a little Bengali ; yet for the sake of our English readers we must observe that this play is much like that of Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare It commenced with the music of the Orchestra which was very pleasing. The native musical instruments, such as the Sitar, the Saranghi, the Pakwaj, and others, were played by Hindus almost all Brahmins and among them the violin was admirably managed by Babu Brojonath Goshain, who received frequent applauses from the surrounding visitors, but unfortunately he was but imperfectly heard by the assembly. Before the curtain was drawn a prayer was sung to the Almighty, a

Hindu custom in such ceremonies, and prologues were chanted likewise previous to the opening of the play suiting the representation. The scenery was generally imperfect, the perspective of the pictures, the clouds, the water were all failures, they denoted both want of taste and sacrifice of judicious principles and the latter were scarcely distinguished except by the one being placed above the other. Though framed by native painters, they would have been much superior had they been executed by careful hands The house of Raja Birshingha and the apartment of his daughter were, however, done tolerably well. The part of Sundar, the hero of the poem, was played by a young lad Shamcharan Banerjee of Baranogore, who inspite of his praiseworthy efforts did not do the entire justice of his performance. It is a character which affords sufficient opportunity to display theatrical talents by the frequent and sudden change of pantomime and by playing such tricks as to prevent the Raja who is the father of the heroine of the play, from detecting the amorous plot. Young Shamacharan tried occasionally to vary the expression of his feelings, but his gestures seemed to be studied and his motions stiff. The parts of the Raja and others were performed to the satisfaction of the whole audience.

"The female characters in particular were excellent. The part of Bidya (the daughter of Raja Bir Singh) the lover of Sundar played by Radhamoni (generally called Moni) a girl of nearly 16 years of age, was very ably sustained: her graceful motions, her sweet voice and her love tricks with Sundar filled the minds of the audience with rapture and delight. The sudden change of her countenance amidst her joys and her lamentations, her

words so pathetic, and her motions so truly expressive, when informed that her love was detected and when he was dragged before her father, were highly creditable to herself and to the stage. When apprised that Sundar was orderd to be executed, her attendants tried in vain to console her, she dropped down and fainted, and on recovering, through the care of her attendant fell senseless again and the audience was left for some time in awful silence. That a person uneducated as she is, and unacquainted with the niceties of her vernacular language, should perform a part so difficult with general satisfaction and receive loud and frequent applauses, was indeed quite unexpected. The other female characters were equally well performed, and amongst the rest we must not omit to mention that the part of the Rani or wife of Raja Birshingha and that of Malini (a name applied to women who deal in flowers) were acted by an elderly woman Joy-Durga, who did justice to both characters in the two-fold capacity; she eminently appeared amongst the other performers, and delighted the hearers with songs; and another woman Raj Kumari usually called Raju played the part of a maid servant to Bidya, if not in a superior manner yet as ably as Joy-Durga.

"We rejoice that in the midst of ignorance such examples are produced which are beyond what we could have expected. Ought not the very sight of these girls induce our visitors present on this occasion to spare no time in educating their wives and daughters"—

"We wish every success to this praise-worthy undertaking—we entertain no doubt of its continuance as long as the propneter perseveres in his zealous exertions. Let

him employ effectual means for the prevention of the debasing system now existing in regard to Hindu females. Let him devise new methods of improvement ; and above all resolutely keep his theatre up and like the Hindu Theatre, not suffer it to meet with a death-blow in its very origin. This will be doing much real good to society and earning the unqualified praise from the public. Such deeds speak for themselves, they attract glory from all quarters and thus are worthy men crowned with unfading splendour !"

Other Anglo-Indian papers however, condemned the whole thing on the ground of public morality. "The Hurkara" remarked it as an indecent play and the "Englishman" too followed suit. In reference to the remarks of a correspondent in it that "such theatricals far from being attended with any advantage moral or intellectual to the Hindus, it behoves every friend to the people to discourage such exhibitions, which are equally devoid of novelty, utility and even decency," the "Englishman" made the following observation—

"Our correspondent has lifted the veil with which the writer of the sketch sought to screen the real character of these exhibitions and we hope we shall hear no more of them in the "Hindu Pioneer" unless it be to donounce them."*

It is however useless to bring such a charge against Bharat Chandra who flourished before the battle of Plassy and who admittedly wrote this poem to humour his royal boss who would have probably a support to

* Vide Calcutta Courier dated Oct 28 1835 and 'Purohit' by Pandit Vidyanidhi.

effusions of amorous dalliance; and judging by the modern standard even Shakespeare would appear indelicate if not obscene in many places even in his great tragedies, as in Othello playing the beast with two backs. Objections might have been taken to the presence of public women on the stage, but the Bengali Society as it was (or as it is even today) can not make room for anything else.

Nabin Babu's enthusiasm and endeavours to make improvements to the Bengali Stage ruined him altogether and he was involved in debts of more than two lacs of rupees. His name however, will ever remain embalmed in the pages of history for effecting a practical fusion of the eastern and western schools of dramatic art and for his bold innovations which did cost him his whole fortune—**A nation can not afford to forget him who tried to contribute so much to the public recreation and joy.**

CHAPTER VII

ENGLISH PLAYS BY THE BENGALI STUDENTS

Vidyasundar was tried at one corner of the town but the general body of students was for English plays.

AT THE GOVERNMENT HOUSE

The influence of English Theatres and that of their own professors was very much at work and the representations of the Italian company at this time on the board of the Chowringhee began to impart new manners of inspiration and amusement with the result that Indian educated opinion began to manifest itself in various ways and the writings of English and Bengali Papers began to infuse spirit into the hearts of our youngmen of the time. It was in the fitness of things that our educated countrymen should have substituted these refined amusements which afforded entertainments for the senses as well as the imagination, whilst they improved taste in the place of their ancient, rude and gross Kabis, Jatras and Nautches.

In 1837, the students of the Hindu college and Sanskrit College represented a few plays of Shakespeare or different scenes therefrom in different places more in the nature of recitations, during the occasion of the distribution of prizes On the 30th March of the same year they played under the direct supervision of Dr

Wilson—"The King and Miller", Shakespeare's Seven Ages from "As you Like it" and Topsy Toso Pet, Lodgings For Single Agent, the Dramatic Aspirant and the Merchant of Venice, at the Government White House. Merchant of Venice had the following cast—*

Salarino—Gopal Nath Mukherjee,
Duke—Rajendra Nath Sen.
Shylock—Uma Charan Mitra.
Portia—Abhoy Charan Bose.
Bassanio—Rajendra Narain Bose.
Nerissa—Rajendra Narain Mitra.
Gratiano—Rajendra Dutta.
Antonio—Kali Krishna Ghose.
Nellay Gray—Govinda Chandra Dutta.

Like Professor Wilson and Captain Richardson, there was another teacher whose influence in creating a taste for histrionic art and love of drama amongst the Bengali students was great. He was a French scholar and his name was Herman Jeffroy. At first he practised as a Barrister in the Calcutta Supreme Court, but on account of his questionable morals he was not allowed to practise till he was reformed. But no sooner he gave up the legal profession than he became a thoroughly changed man and subsequently earned the reputation of possessing an ideal character And though later on, Sir Edward Ryan, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court requested him to resume his practice, Jeffroy could not, however, see his way to do it, but took up the vocation of a teacher. As Head Master of the "Oriental Seminary" his methods of

* Mohendra Nath Vidyanidhi's account.

Darpan (183 1st April also gives an account w h thi di ference hat A o o vas represe ed by (opal Ch n lra Dutta

teaching for the intellectual and moral culture of the students was considered ideal and youngmen flocked to him in numbers.

In 1840, on the occasion of the visit of the Governor General Lord Auckland to the Oriental Seminary, Herman Jeffroy attempted to organise a performance of Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar in his school through the assistance of his friend and countryman Mr. Reshi versed in dramatic art Babu Gour Mohan Addy, proprietor of the school was prevailed upon to bear the expenses of the performance and agreed to pay Rs 500/-. But as no further sum could be raised, Mr. Reshi's attempt proved abortive. It is probably about this, though we do not get further authority, the Calcutta Courier of Jan. 28, 1840 makes the following reference :—

A prospectus for the establishment of a Hindu Theatre is now in the course of circulation amongst the friends of native. ... as the individual (an Englishman) with whom it has originated was for sometime connected with the Drury Lane Theatre and who, we hear, is much esteemed for his histrionic attainments, we can reasonably entertain a hope that it would not altogether prove unsuccessful.' The taste created by Mr. Jeffroy was not however damped and twelve years after i.e. in 1852 and 1853, a number of theatrical associations was started at Burtola mainly by the students. We have on the authority of "Viswakosh" that Julius Cæsar was staged at the Metropolitan Academy in 1852 by the ex-students of the Oriental Seminary formerly trained by Jeffroy and Reshi, that messers Clinger and Roberts formerly of the Sans-Souci gave them a training and that tickets were

sold at the performance. We have no authority of the above in any of the contemporaneous records, but Pandit Mohendra Nath Bidyanidhi in his "Sandarbha Sangraha" and Pandit Sarat Chandra Ghosal in "Narayana" assert the same. Babu Jogendra Nath Bose does not mention in the history given by him about Metropolitan Academy performance and speaks of *Julius Cæsar and Merchant of Venice being staged by the students of the David Hare Academy there.*

From all sources we have in hand we think that Julius Caesar was played at Metropolitan Academy, and Merchant of Venice at the David Hare Academy and that sale of tickets at the Oriental Theatre in 1854 was mistaken by people for that at the M Academy. It is however doubtless that at Burtala performances were held by students of the other two institutions.

At the David Hare Academy, too, Merchant of Venice was played on the 15th Feb. 1853 by the students in a nicely set up and decorated stage through the exertion of some skilled Englishmen *

Babu Rajendra Dutt of Malanga, a generous man of the town, took special interest in the performance which was held on the first night on the occasion of the distribution of prizes. A neat pavillion was built and decoration done by some Englishmen. † We have on the authority of Hurkara that Mr. Clunger, Headmaster of

---

* We are requested to mention that the first public examination of the pupils of the David Hare Academy will take place this morning at the Town Hall. . Instead of the customary display of the pyrotechnics, the pupils have resolved to celebrate the examination by enacting, at the *school premises a few* scenes from the Merchant of Venice.

Bengal Hurkara Feb 15 1853 p 182

† Probhakar 10th Feb 1853.

the English Department of the Calcutta Madrassa gave instruction on Shakespeare's dramatic plays to the alumni of the David Hare Academy and succeeded in training some boys to the competent performance of the plays taught them and accordingly the play took place on two *nights* in the hall of the Institution. The part of Shylock was pronounced the best and the Merchant of Venice etc. was rather defective which it was hoped, diligence and performance would perfect in time. *

The attendance was large (600 or 700) consisting of Englishmen and Indians who were all pleased with the performances.

The trial scene, Portia's speech as counsel, Shylock's demand of a pound of flesh, and the Duke all reminded one of the Sans Souci, then extinct.†

THE ORIENTAL THEATRE

In the year 1853, Babu Prianath Dutt with the assistance of his able co-adjutors Badu Dinonath Ghose, Sitaram Ghose and other ex-students of the Oriental Seminary started the "Oriental Theatre" by building a stage in the school premises itself at Guranhatta No. 264, Chitpure Road. Babu Keshab Chandra Gangulee whom Michael M. S. Dutt called the Garrick of the Bengali stage also joined his friends shortly after. These two brilliant artists Keshab Chandra and Prianath were the principal figures in the Belgachhia and Pathuraghata Theatres and had a large share to coutribute to the development of the Bengali stage.

* The Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette Feb 28, 1853.

† The Sambad Probhakar Dated Feb 26, 1853 spoke of the second performance on 24th the first having taken place on 16th Feb

The Theatre lasted till 1855 and amateurs successfully staged some of Shakespeare's plays under the coaching of Mr. Clinger. This is what Babu Gourdas Bysak wrote in his reminiscences of Michæl M. S. Dutt :—

"Next during 1853-55 some of the ex-students of the Oriental Seminary formed a dramatic corps under the drilling of Mr. Clinger who belonged to the old Sans-Souci Theatre and opened a stage called the "Oriental Theatre" in the premises of the Seminary, where they acted the plays of Othello, Merchant of Venice etc. etc."

Michæl's biography by J. N. Bose page 647.

The students and ex-students raised a subscription of Rs. 800 among themselves and with that the stage was built and dresses purchased.

April 7, 1853, p. 38, the Bengal Hurkaru.

They then successfully performed the following plays :—

Othello—26th September 1853 and Oct, 5, 1853*
Merchant of Venice—2nd March and 17th March, 1854.
Henry the Fourth (1st part)—15th Feb. 1855.

The actors did great justice to the parts distributed as follows :—

Babu Prianath Dutt—Iago, Shylock and Falstaff.
Babu Radha Prasad Bysak—Emilia, Portia.
Keshab Chandra Gangulee—Henry and Major Bruce (No part in Julius Cæsar).
Khagendra Nath Mullick—Brabantio.
Raj Rajendra Misra—Desdemona.†

* Citizen Oct. 5 1853

† Vidyamdhu [illegible] t.

In commenting on one of the performances the reporter of the "Hurkara" of date Sept. 28, 1853 states :—

"The performers were, all of them, youngmen .. and the character which we feared would be the worst represented, was the best represented—Iago by Babu Prianath Dey * was acted with an evident knowledge of the character.. the mode in which they acquitted themselves must have given much satistaction to every member of the audience who cares for the intellectual improvement of his native fellow-citizens."

The house was full and the audience the most respectable consisting amongst other influential men of lead and light, Raja Pertaubchand, Babu Ram Gopal Ghose, Mr. Charles Allen C. S. Mr. Lushington C. S Mr. Seton Karr. C. S. *Ibid.*

From an advertisement given in *Citizen* of March 2, 1854, we gather about the performance of another play Merchant of Venice having commenced at 8½ p.m. and that tickets were priced at Rs. 2/- Babu Umesh Chandra Banerjee (next Mr W. C. Banerjee) was in charge of the cash.

How often the English scholars liked the representation of Shakespeare's plays by the Bengali students will be clear from the observations of Morning Chronicle of March 2, 1854 :—

"Those who are desirous of seeing how young native gentlemen can wear the buskin, should attend the Oriental Theatre this evening and we promise them that they will come away with a higher inpression of native tragic talent than that with which they may possibly, at present, be

* It must be Dutt

improved. We recollect some months ago witnessing at the same Theatre a performance of Othello and we presume the same company will appear to-night, we have no doubt that they will be well worth-hearing."

Merchant of Venice is the first public entertainment after Disguise when prices of admission were charged. On the 2nd night of performance—17th March the important part of Portia was played by an English actress Mrs. Greig,* this being her last performance during her short sojourn in Bengal. With a lady artist for the main part and a number of brilliant amateurs to support, the Oriental Theatre was a very respectable organisation which set the examples to the aristocratic persons in Bengal staging Bengali dramas.

The Oriental Theatre was in suspension for sometime; the last performance was about a year after when Shakespeare's tragedy Henry the fourth (1st part) was staged on the 15th Feb. 1855. There was also an after piece, a very amusing farce of the "Amateurs" † by Mr. H. M. Parker B. C. S. written expressly for the amateurs of the old Chowringhee Theatre $. The managers were able to secure the patronage of His Excellency the Governor General—Lord Dalhousee.

Citizen Feb. 15, 1855.

These performances were no doubt in English but give an ample reply to the ungenerous attacks of East Indian and other Anglo-Indian Journals and how these performances were appreciated we would better quote the

* Jogindra Nath Bose's biography of M. S Dutt and the Bengal Hurkara March 16, 1854.

† Citizen Feb 15 1855

$ Vide page 248 Supra.

opinions of a Bengali correspondent of the Bengal Hurkara of Feb. 16, 1855, with which we are in full agreement :—

"The Oriental Theatre is purely the offspring of native exertions and affords the last evidence of the growing perseverance of our countrymen in laudable pursuits and their appreciation of national amusements. The actors, it is well-known, had acquitted themselves on the last two occasions when they appeared on the stage with the Tragedy of Othello and the Merchant of Venice to the satisfaction of the public and won merited applause from individuals from whom a word of favour is an honour, we sincerely wish them the same success this time.

"It is indeed gratifying to observe the rapid devolopment of refined feelings among the Hindus. Half a Century before, the baneful influence of Mahamedan despotism kept the nation not only under a political but moral stupor. Their minds were cramped and they were in a state of lamentable degradation. But the work of improvement has begun and we are glad to see them progressing in the scale of being Of this there is not a better index—than the circumstance of their having adopted amusements which combine the double advantage of recreating their minds and ennobling their sentiments. God only knows how bad is our Bengali stage. Immorality of every species is suffered to stalk on it, and vice receives from it a warm support. Licentiousness and theft, adultery and mendacity walk hand in hand without being checked by any kind of moral control. It is, therefore the duty of every one to whom India has given birth, to be up with a stout heart and a strong hand to assist

the young amateurs of the Oriental Theatre who have so widely opened a channel of entertainment which is free from the dross of immorality. Let it be borne in the mind of all that with our Patriarch Dramatists our Theatrical glay is gone, and if every encouragement be now afforded to these our Juvenile friends we may not despair to see a better day when our dramatic and historic glory will advance"—

The correspondent's hopes are now being realised and shall gradually be so. The Oriental Theatre was no more heard of, probably due to internal troubles amongst actors and authorities—but a new renaissance sprang up giving rise to Bengali dramas and the following lines of Rajah Iswar Chandra Singh to Babu Keshab Chandra Gangulee of the 27th August 1858, gives a partial idea .—

"Now first of all three or four years ago when you all quarrelled with the Proprietor of the Oriental Seminary*, we all proposed to have a native drama written out and acted and such was our earnestness in the cause that we all asked you to select and hire a site and a native gentleman was asked either for the loan or hire of his premises—Some how or other the subject dropped here and was never thought of till a year and a half ago, when we found some youngsters getting up a representation of a native drama."

Michæl's biography by J. N. Bose, page 220.

Hindu Patriot thought these quarrels serious and gave the following history :—

---

* Probably owing to the difference of opinion regarding staging of Bengal plays.

"Although the full measure of success which was anticipated could not be realised, yet the public especially the native community showed a taste for such performances which promised the best results if the managers of the theatre had only the tact to profit by the happy opportunity. Instead, however, of fostering, by repeated and well-got up performances, the taste thus created, they permitted minor jealousies and a spirit of contention to demolish the good they have achieved, and the curtain fell upon the stage to be lifted up no more." *

At Baranashi Ghose's Street

The transition from English to Bengali Drama will occupy some more pages in the next Chapter, and we shall take leave of our readers mentioning about only one performance—at Baranashi Ghosh's Street When Oriental theatre was the talk of the day, Julius Cæsar was staged at Baranashi Ghose's Street at the house of Babu Pyari Mohan Bose (nephew of Babu Nabin Krishna Bose of Shambazar fame), Pyari Babu's sons appearing in the principal parts of the play. Babu Brojalal Bose, father of late Babu Mohendra Nath Bose, the great tragedian of Bengal, was one of the actors and the first performance was held on the 3rd May 1854 with success as the following account would show :—

"Pyari Babu's house was illumined and decorated in the nicest way. The audience numbered about 400, and would have been more but for rain and storm. Babu Mohendra Nath Bose acted in the role of Cæsar, Kistoodhan Dutt of Brutus and Jadu Nath Chatterjee

* H. P Feb 5 1857

of Cassius and the artists were thus all of culture. Even the performance by the amateurs of the Oriental Theatre stood inferior in comparison, and they were astonished at the excellent way the performance of such a difficult play was rendered."

S. Probh 5th May 1854.

Mr. Clinger's teaching was however considered defective and the Hindu Patriot (May 11, 1854) wanted to dismiss with it 'as that man would spoil everything'. Its comment therefore was a bit very strong and far from encouraging. The scenery, stage and decorations were in its opinion highly creditable and Babu Jadunath Chatterjee an ex-pupil of the Oriental Seminary did remarkably well. He seemed to feel what he acted and having by nature the advantage of a lean and hungry look he fitted very well the part of the Roman conspirator.

But the people wished for Bengali plays and cravings of the Bengali audience were not satisfied with performances in English. Nevertheless we agree with Babu Gourdas Bysak that "these novel amusements, though after the fashion of English Amateur theatricals were not without their effect on the development of the histrionic art among our countrymen. They *paved* the way for the establishment of a **national theatre** in our midst."

SUMMARY

We are at the end of the present Volume and we believe that a brief recapitulation of the main topics may be helpful, before the reader pursues the thread of our narration in the succeeding volume.

We think we have justified by facts and figures the proposition, with which we had started in the beginning, that the Bengali drama has its origin in the distant past, though the modern Bengali stage is an adaptation after the western theatre.

As there is an inseverable connection between the past and the present, we have followed the evolutionary growth of the Indian stage from the earliest time down to the early beginnings of the Bengali stage.

We have shown that Indian drama is of purely Indian origin and it dates back to the legendary days of hoary antiquity.

The legends tell us that Brahma learnt the dramatic art from God Siva, the Adinata, or Natarāja, and the latter in his turn taught the same to sage Bharata, and the first dramatic representation on the stage was the victory of the gods over the demons. The demons caused interruption to the performance; thereupon, Indra, the chief of the Gods, chastised the Asuras for their insolence and henceforth a dramatic performance came to be associated with the worship of Jarjara—or the flag-staff of Indra—something like the May-pole of the European countries At any rate, the earliest dramatic

representations were connected with the religious festivities of the people

Leaving aside the legends, when we come to tangible historical evidence, we find that the most ancient works of the Hindus, like the Vedas, the Upanishadas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Srimad Bhagwata abound in dramatic elements. Besides, Panini who flourished about 3000 B. C., mentions Shilali and Krishasa as two authorities on dramatic art But Bharata's Natya Shastra is the complete settler. Bharata who flourished in the 5th century B. C. has left an exhaustive treatise on dramaturgy, where not only various kinds of dramas and their representations have been mentioned, but elaborate descriptions of the stage and of the auditorium have been given. Such a work could never be written if dramas were not popular in the country. It is idle to hold, as some one has fancied, that Indian drama has evolved out of puppet-shows. The word 'Sutradhara' alone—i. e. holder of the string, or wire-puller in one sense—is not sufficient to support such a theory.

Apart from purely literary proofs, we also find archæological evidence about the popularity of dramatic performance in ancient India, espicially in the Budhistic period we come across several plastic representations of dramatic scenes in architecture. The rock edict of Girnar and the inscriptions of the Sitabenga cave conclusively prove that Emperor Asoka the Great was a lover of drama. Writings in the Jogimara cave tell us the tale of a primadonna's love with an actor of that time.

Those who run away with the idea that the Indian

drama is of Greek origin are absolutely wrong. Javanika (meaning the curtain) has not been mentioned by any ancient Sanskrit dramatist, it is only in the Karpur-Manjari, a Prakrit drama of the tenth century, that the word occurs for the first time.

The works of the famous Sanskrit dramatists, like those of Kalidasa, Bhasa, Bhavabhuti and others show to what great perfection the dramatic art rose in India. Besides, a Sanskrit drama is quite different from a Greek play in structure as well in spirit. There is no Tragedy in Sanskrit. Thus "there is no real evidence for assuming any influence of Greek examples upon the Indian drama at any stage of its progress."

The modern Bengali drama is of lineal descent from the ancient Sanskrit drama, though time has wrought many changes in the former. Traces of early dramatic works by the Bengalees have been found in different parts of India, e g. Parijat Manjuri Natika, engraved on a slab of black stone found in Gujerat, Parijat Haran and the VidyaVilap in Assam. But the Indian stage received a severe shock just at the time when English life and English literature found their fullest expressions in the works of the great Elizabethan masters: for Indian drama declined under the Moslem rule.

The rise of Srichaitanya marks the dawn of a new era in the history of Bengal. Her art and industry revived with the swell of her religious emotions.

Srichaitanya Himself with some of His associates acted some devotional pieces, and in one of them He appeared in the role of Rukmini.

Dramatic literature received a great impetus from

Srichaitanya. His friend and follower, Ramananda Rai wrote Jaganath Vallabha, and His devotee, Rup Goswami wrote the Vidagdha Madhava and the Lalit Madhava Nataka.

But the stage received no direct patronage from the ruling power, and in its place Jatras, Krishna-Kritans, Kavis and Panchalis came into vogue, for a people cannot continue long without some sort of popular amusement; they must have their own recreation. The Krishna Jatra was known as the Kaliya Daman and referred indiscriminately to all the incidents of Srikrishna's life that a Jatra might deal with. The influence of Bengali Krishna Kirtans spread far and wide, and it can be detected even to-day in distant Manipur.

There were famous Jatrawallas in the past, like Sridam, Suhal, Parmananda, Gopal Ooray, Moti Roy and others. Krishna Kamal Goswami,—a man of decent taste and of real poetic talents, wrote a few devotional pieces of Jatra and they were acted in East Bengal, when the people of West Bengal indulged in the lewd orgies of the Vidya Sundar. Jatra and Kavis, however, soon fell out of favour for their low tastes, and many spirited writers, like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, raised their voice of protest against the vulgar tastes that were then current in the Jatras and the Kavis of Bengal. During the evil days of the Jatra, the eyes of the educated Bengalis fell on another source of national amusement.

We now come to the Second Part of the present volume.

The early English settlers of Calcutta founded a theatre for their own am ent in Lal Bazar at the

North East corner of Mission Row long before the Battle of Plassey. It was known as the Play House. After the old Play House a new play house, called the Calcutta Theatre was opened in 1776. It was situated at the back of the present Writers' Buildings.

After the Calcutta Theatre, Mrs. Bristow's private Theatre came into existence. It was Mrs. Bristow who first introduced women upon the Calcutta Stage.

All these theatres were intended exclusively for the amusement of the English. But the success of these theatres inspired a Russian adventurer to open a Bengali Theatre for the Bengalis in 1795. It was a red-letter day in the history of the Bengali Stage. The initiative came from a foreigner, but the execution and its success depended upon a Bengali, named Golak Nath Das. He was, in fact, the Dramatic Director and it was he who supplied Lebedeff with actors of both sexes. The Theatre was in Domtolla—in a lane leading out of Old China Bazar. We hear only of its two performances:—"The Disguise" and "Love is the best Doctor." Nothing more can be known about Golak Nath Das. This was the first Modern Bengali Theatre.

Lebedeff's Theatre was, however, abruptly given up.

But the play house, that exercised a very great influence upon the educated Bengalis and inspired them with the desire to possess a theatre of their own, was the Chowringhee Theatre founded in 1831. With it eminent educationists like Dr. H H. Wilson and Capt. D. L. Richardson were intimately connected. Richardson's influence over his pupils had a great deal to do with the foundation of the Modern Bengali Stage

It was the Chowringhee Theatre that inspired Prasanna Kumar Tagore to start the Hindu Theatre in 1831. The Hindu Theatre was the first Bengali attempt in this direction. But in the Hindu Theatre, Eastern dramas were acted in English, being translated into the latter language.

But the first genuinely Bengali Theatre was Nabin Babu's Theatre. This private Theatre, got up and supported by Babu Nabin Chandra Bose at his Shambazar residence in 1833, was, in fact, the first nucleus of the Modern Bengali Theatre which in course of years, and mainly by the efforts of one supreme dramatist and artist, we mean Girish Chandra Ghose, has attained its present stage.

The Sans Souci Theatre of Mrs. Leach, though mentioned after the Chowringhee Theatre in connection with the English Theatres of Calcutta, was opened in 1839 i.e. after the Hindn Theatre and Nabin Babu's Theatre.

Youngmen who used to recite different scenes of Shakespeare were still fond of English plays, but gradually there came a change in their tastes and with it the development of Bengali Stage began.

What was the first Bengali play and how Bengali dramas have attained their present perfection will be discussed in the next two volumes, the first up to the passing of the Dramatic Performances Act, and the Second, up to the death of the great dramatist and the father of the Bengali Stage—Girish Chandra Ghose.

Thus we come to the beginning of the Modern Bengali Stage. The Second Volume will deal with the first Bengali Theatre especially in pre-Girish-days up to the Dramatic Perfoı ces Act the Third Volume will devote

itself entirely to Girish Chandra Ghose, the master dramatist and actor and his contemporary actors and dramatists ; and the Fourth, or the last volume will deal with the Bengali stage in post-Girish period up to the present day.

INDEX

B—*contd.*

G—*contd.*

H

I

J

K

N—*contd.*

O

P

P—*contd.*

R

S

S—*contd*

T

U

U—*contd.*

V

W

Y

Please Note—Chowringee Theatre was started in 1813 and not in 183
on page 311